OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

A TRIBUTE TO PSYGNOSIS

ART SUPREMO JEFF BRAMFITT LOOKS BACK AT THE LABEL'S FINEST GAMES

ULTIMATE GUIDE: HANG-ON

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YU SUZUKI'S EPIC COIN-OP HIT

波動拳
昇龍拳
竜巻

CANNON FODDER

RE-EXAMINING SENSI'S SATIRICAL TAKE ON WAR

CAPCOM'S GREATEST FIGHTING GAMES

FROM STREET FIGHTER II TO CAPCOM VS SNK: HOW THE JAPANESE STUDIO DEFINED A GENRE

MAKING OF MAGNETRON

HOW STEVE TURNER CREATED HIS 1988 QUAZATRON SEQUEL

STUART WHYTE

FROM PRODUCING X-COM GAMES TO SPINNING FABLES

FUTURE
LOAD 268

SUPER PLAY'S WIL OVERTON

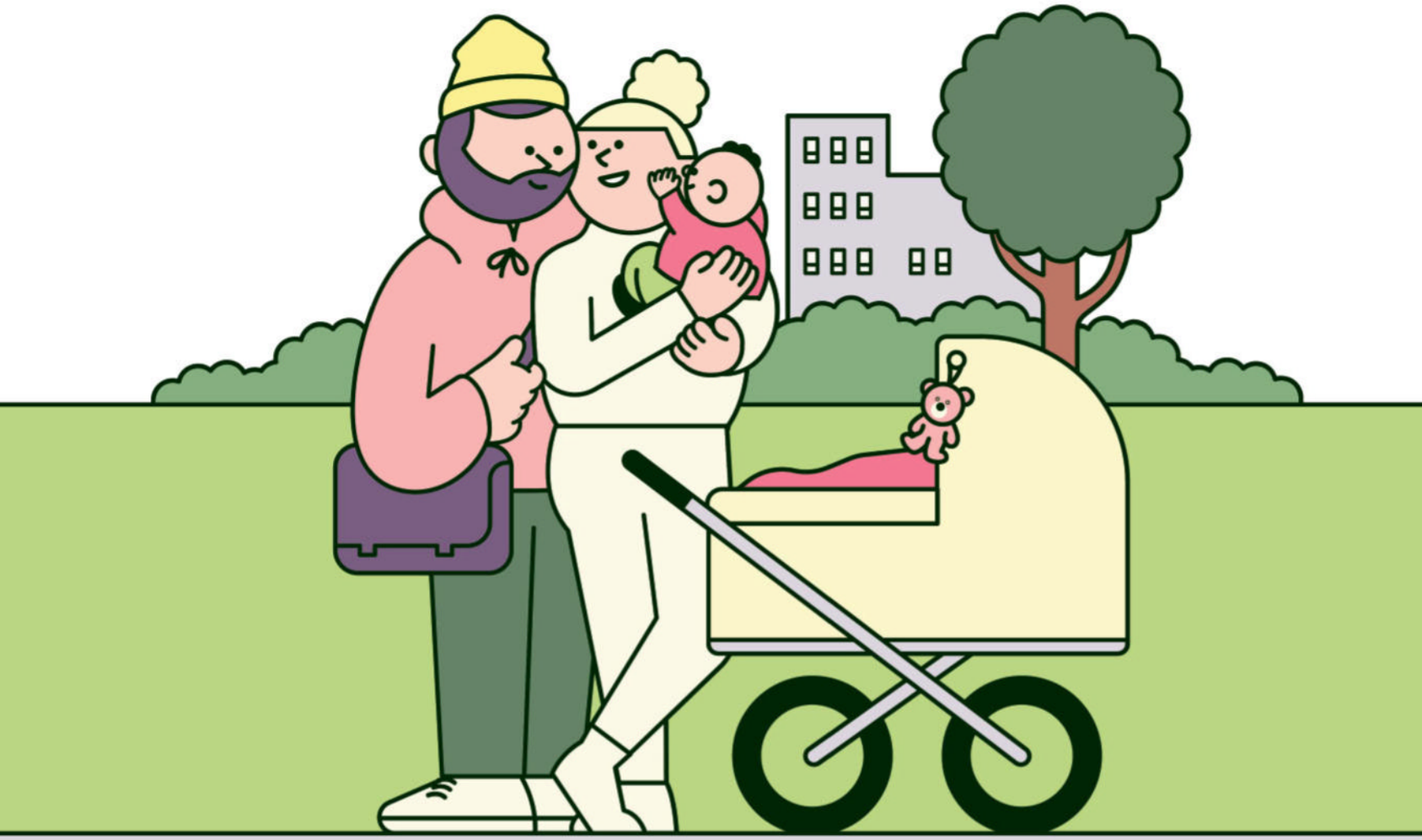
THE ICONIC COVER ARTIST ON RARE, ANIME UK AND MORE

PINBALL WIZARDS

THE STUDIOS REDEFINING DIGITAL SILVER BALL ACTION

Advertisement

WE'VE GOT THE OPTIONS. YOU MAKE THE CHOICE.



GO. COMPARE

Car, home and travel insurance plus broadband, breakdown cover and more.

Get more info or compare quotes for a range of products at Go.Compare.

LOADING...

When it comes to one-on-one fighting games, Capcom is arguably a master of the genre. Along with Sega, Namco and SNK, its games have lit up arcades for decades and instilled fierce competition and dedication within its fanbase.

From masterful 2D entries like *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, to ambitious crossovers like *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* and *Capcom Vs SNK: Millennium Fight 2000*, the publisher has rarely put a step wrong, with even its more divisive titles typically having something interesting to say.

So with that in mind, join us as we award accolades to Capcom's best fighters, from those with outstanding visuals and presentation, to the ones that feature the best fighting mechanics or have endured in popularity for years. We hope you enjoy the ceremony.

Other highlights of this issue include a look at the magazine career of Wil Overton, the creation of *Titus The Fox* and *Magnetron*, and an article on the many great games of Psygnosis. We also celebrate *Cannon Fodder* and *Hang-On* in our latest Ultimate Guides, chat to Stuart Whyte about his impressive career and discover how digital pinball is more popular than ever. Oh, and make sure you take a look at our subscription offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CAPCOM FIGHTING GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I'm a huge fan of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. It's an exquisite-looking game with a surprisingly balanced roster and spectacular animation.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Blasphemous 2*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

It's a toss up between *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and *Street Fighter IV* because I played both of them so much. Though I did play *Special Champion Edition* loads as well…
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Tomb Raider*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

I love so many of them, but I think *Street Fighter Alpha 3* wins out. It's stacked with excellent fighters, it looks great and I even really enjoy the soundtrack, which I know some people don't.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sonic X Shadow Generations*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

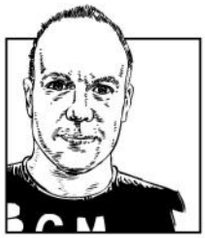
Going to give the same answer as I did last issue I guess, *Special Champion Edition*.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

I've never played the coin-op, but I love the near arcade-perfect Saturn version of *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* for its epic mid-air combos.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *The Great Escape*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

STUART HUNT

It's *Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes* for me. I'm a fan of comic books, huge character rosters and insane, screen-filling special moves.
Expertise: Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing: *Perfect Dark Zero*
Favourite game of all time: *Donkey Kong*



GRAEME MASON

Nothing will beat the sheer joy of playing *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition* on my Mega Drive back in the mid-Nineties. Simply one-on-one fighting perfection.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Indiana Jones And The Great Circle*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

ANDREW FISHER

As a SNES fan, it has to be my import copy of *Super Street Fighter II* for the new characters.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Captain Ishtar 2*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

I'm going to go with the classic: the original *Street Fighter II*. No Turbo nonsense. Just the SNES classic.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Halo Infinite*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

CONTENTS

>> Load 269 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

6 **Main News**
We pay tribute to Team17 cofounder Martyn Brown who sadly passed away in December 2024

8 **Iain Lee**
Do you like KISS? Iain does, but he has rather mixed feelings about the band's licensed videogames

10 **Mr Biffo**
Paul has a secret and he's going to share it with you. It turns out he's not very good at fighting games

12 **A Moment With**
Steve Boxer heads to Rome and visits the GAMM Game Museum. Discover why it's a place worth visiting

14 **Back To The Noughties**
It's August 2008 and Nick is enjoying a round of golf on the Wii and reliving the fallout of the *Alone In The Dark* reboot

REVIVALS

16 **Nifty Lifty**
Nick recalls how watching Darran playing an obscure game on the ZX Spectrum Vega triggered old memories

42 **Out Run**
The tunes might not sound as good as the arcade version, but Darran still had a lot of fun with the Master System conversion of Sega's racing hit

60 **Zoop**
Nick looks back at the time when this puzzle game had grand ambitions to be the next *Tetris*

76 **Batsugun**
While there's a certain smugness from owning obscure games, Darran now realises that sharing is better

92 **Silent Hill 3**
If you've not experienced Konami's sequel before then 2025 is the perfect time to try it

112 **Blazblue: Calamity Trigger**
Nick enjoys a good fighting game and he was particularly enamoured when Arc System Works unleashed this excellent brawler on home consoles

FEATURED

34 **Retro Gamer's Favourite... Budget Games**
Darran takes a look at ten budget classics he used to love playing as a youngster. How many did you experience?

44 **Magazine Craft: Wil Overton**
We're mixing things up this month by speaking to the legendary Wil Overton who created *Super Play's* amazing covers

50 **Peripheral Vision: ROB: Robotic Operating Buddy**
It's that part of the issue where we dedicate two pages to a peripheral you may have owned. Enjoy

62 **Pushing The Limits: Ranger X**
Impressed by how good this Mega Drive game looks and fancy owning it? You may want to check your bank balance

68 **Hardware Heaven: WonderSwan Color**
Nick takes a look at Bandai's handheld sequel which failed to find an audience

70 **Ultimate Guide: Cannon Fodder**
Graham Pembrey looks back at Sensible Software's epic take on war and quizzes Stoo Cambridge about its visuals

78 **Pinball Underground**
Learn how Zen Studios and the Visual Pinball teams are leading a digital revolution of the popular pastime

84 **Retro Inspired: Parking Garage Rally Circuit**
We speak to the creative mind who combined car parks and rallying to create an excellent arcade racer

86 **In The Chair: Stuart Whyte**
From Bullfrog to *Harry Potter* and working with Peter Molyneux. Stuart shares his fascinating career with us

18 **Capcom's Greatest Fighting Games**
Nick hands out awards, while members of the fighting community explain what makes the studio's brawlers so essential

36 **Ultimate Guide: Hang-On**
Martyn Carroll puts on his leathers and races around Yu Suzuki's arcade hit

SAVE UP TO 40% SUBSCRIPTION
SEE PAGE 28

30
The Making Of: Magnetron
Steve Turner on bringing his isometric sequel to the Commodore 64

64
The Making Of: Titus The Fox

REVIEWS

94 Chromatic
96 Donkey Kong Country Returns HD
96 Accolade Sports Collection
96 Tales Of Monsterland DX
96 Under Defeat

ESSENTIALS

28 **Subscriptions**
More satisfying than pulling off a spectacular 12-hit air combo

98 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher has another great selection of games for you

102 **Hot Topic: Pondering Psygnosis**
The team discuss *Shadow Of The Beast*, *WipEout*, *Lemmings* and more

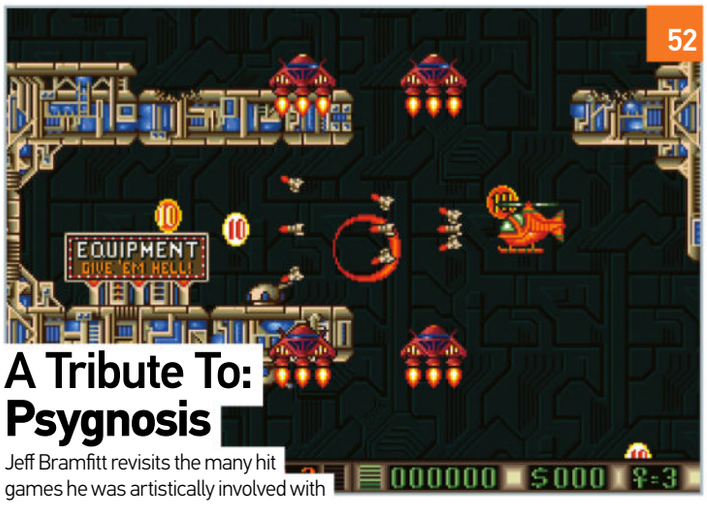
104 **Collector's Corner**
Our latest collector has an amazing shrine that's dedicated to Nintendo

106 **My Retro Life**
Nick shares his love of trading card games and the digital versions he plays

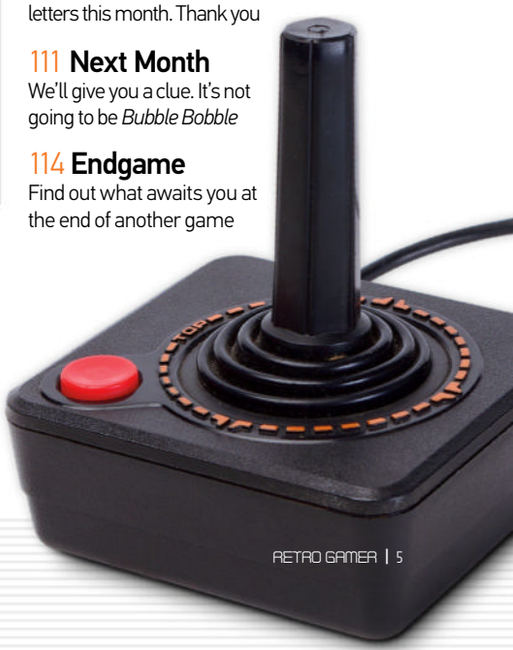
108 **Mailbag**
We've had another bulging bag of letters this month. Thank you

111 **Next Month**
We'll give you a clue. It's not going to be *Bubble Bobble*

114 **Endgame**
Find out what awaits you at the end of another game



52
A Tribute To: Psygnosis
Jeff Bramfitt revisits the many hit games he was artistically involved with



» [Amiga] *Worms* is arguably the biggest hit Team17 has had and it has received numerous sequels over the years.

MARTYN BROWN PASSES

The Team17 cofounder and Worms producer leaves a towering legacy

CONTENTS

6 MARTYN BROWN PASSES
Friends and family pay tribute to the cofounder of Team17

8 IAIN LEE
This month Iain recalls KISS-licensed games

10 MR BIFFO
Paul explains that he's not particularly good at fighting games

12 A MOMENT WITH
Steve Boxer takes a trip to Rome and visits the GAMM Game Museum

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick landed his souped-up DeLorean in August 2008. What will he discover there?

Games industry leaders have paid tribute to Martyn Brown, who died in December at the age of 57. In a statement on gamesindustry.biz his eldest son Jack wrote, "Martyn passed away peacefully in his sleep at 8:17am, 28th of December 2024 surrounded by family, following a prolonged battle with a series of strokes. Know that he went out on his own terms listening to his favourite music and surrounded by loved ones."

Worms, *Alien Breed*, *Superfrog* and *Project-X* are among more than 50 games that Martyn helped deliver to the delight of players during his 35 years in the industry, which included roles in development, direction and production. Among those paying their respects on social media was Revolution Software CEO and founder Charles Cecil, who wrote, "Martyn was extraordinarily generous, both socially and professionally. Those who knew him will greatly miss that wonderful, mischievous smile that always greeted you. That generosity extended to wanting to mentor and support his fellow videogame developers." Martyn's generosity of spirit was also celebrated by Worms composer Bjørn Lynne, who remembers that at Team 17, "Martyn was always the glue, the voice everyone loved and respected, who held it all together."

» [Amiga] *Full Contact* was the first game that Team17 released and impressed with its fluid animation.

» Martyn Brown was one of Team17's cofounders, overseeing numerous games from *Worms* and *Project X* to the *Alien Breed* series.

Back in issue 73 of **Retro Gamer**, Martyn recalled becoming captivated by gaming at a young age. "I think it was just a fascination when I first saw the early *Pong* games," he reflected. "My dad brought one home and that was that. I later got an Atari VCS and avidly followed the development of arcade machines. I vividly recall seeing both *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* for the first time and I was just hooked; totally and utterly obsessed. I was always designing my own board games and, as a single child, videogames represented a real opportunity to play games that didn't need someone else. That was quite a thing for me."

After learning to program on the ZX Spectrum and earning £250 for his first published game *Henry's Hoard*, Martyn first upgraded to a Commodore 128D, before discovering the Amiga and quickly becoming a huge fan. He then launched 17Bit, a club for Amiga enthusiasts, so named because, "It

> "Martyn was extraordinarily generous, both socially and professionally"
> CHARLES CECIL

was that 'bit better than the rest' in a 16-bit computer world." The ambitious collective with members in both Sweden and the UK soon rebranded themselves as Team17. "It was fun, exciting, bleeding edge and totally ad hoc," Martyn said of that time in his life. "And it felt great. We were just young guys with little to no experience, simply wanting to create something of value and worth. And we liked a beer, so new games were discussed in the pub."

Team17 earned acclaim with Amiga games such as *Full Contact*, *Assassin*, *Kwak* and *Body Blows*, all of which Martyn was involved in making as a producer or director whilst overseeing development for the studio. He also project-managed the *Alien Breed* games, the *Special Edition* release of which held top position in the UK budget game charts for 33 weeks. Then there was *Worms*, designed by Andy Davidson and signed up and produced by Martyn. The cartoon artillery game achieved phenomenal success and launched a massive franchise that continues to maintain huge popularity.

» [Amiga] The *Alien Breed* series was another success story for Team17 in its early years, with influences including *Aliens* and *Gauntlet*.

Martyn left Team17 after two decades in 2010 to become an independent videogame consultant. In that capacity he worked with various developers and helped to set-up The Blast Furnace, Activision's mobile games development studio. In 2003 he cofounded Games Republic, which specialises in games industry networks, events and business development.

Despite being too unwell to attend, Martyn received a Games Legend award from Games Republic at their GaMaYo (Game Makers Yorkshire) Awards in November last year.

Many of the online tributes to Martyn have celebrated his determination to lift others up in their careers. "He had a knack for realising potential and then bringing out the best in you," shared *Alien Breed* composer Allister Brimble, who added, "Without him, I doubt I would have had a career in game music. I know this to be true for many others in graphics, art and code."

Similarly, Christian Cantamessa, designer of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and writer of *Red Dead Redemption*, wrote that Martyn was a personal mentor and "a mythological figure for me in my teenage years, as I played in awe Team17 classics on my Amiga such as *Alien Breed* and *Project-X*. I have Martyn to thank for my beginnings in the industry".

Martyn is survived by his wife Heather, his sons Jack and Harry and his step-daughter Darcy. Our thoughts go out to all his friends and family. ✱

» [Amiga] Team17 dabbled in numerous genres, but was well known for its focus on arcade-like titles such as *Project-X*.

» [iOS] Martyn was also involved with The Blast Furnace, which released an entertaining update of *Pitfall!* for Activision in 2012.

MY ARCADE GROWS

Mini-arcade specialist My Arcade has made waves with a flurry of hardware reveals. A partnership with Sega will see classics such as *Out Run*, *Golden Axe* and *Shinobi* launched as miniature cabinets. More than 100 Capcom and Namco games will be playable on a suite of handheld and HDMI consoles branded Gamestation Retro, which will also have an Atari edition. The company is also reviving Super RetroChamp, its handheld compatible with Mega Drive and SNES cartridges.

BLAZE RAISES PRICES

The cost of Evercade cartridges increased at the end of January, with manufacturer Blaze attributing its first price change since 2021 to "increasing costs and demand for materials and international transport". Standard carts have gone up to £19.99 while the more powerful Giga Carts are now £24.99. On the upside, Blaze argues the shift will allow them to "secure more stock and improve availability throughout 2025 and beyond".

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Kiss, kiss, bang, bang

For some unfathomable reason at the turn of the century I was obsessed with the rock band KISS. It started off ironically but I very quickly got pulled in. I had everything they'd ever released excluding music between 1982 and 1999 because once the make-up came off they sucked hard. I remember making a staircase of bootleg VHS tapes for my cat Velvet so she could reach the stupidly high cat flap. THAT'S HOW DEEP INTO THEM I WAS!

KISS famously put their name on absolutely anything that might make them a dollar, condoms and coffins being the most famously exploitative. Speaking of dollars, you know the image of a swag bag with a $ symbol on it? Gene Simmons, the bass player, owns the copyright to that image. I'm not even joking. When Teenage Fanclub used a picture of that, Simmons sued the heck out of them.

It was inevitable that KISS would eventually sanction some videogames. One was incredible, one was a turkey the size of Paul Stanley's stacked boots he would wear to hide the fact he was tiny.

First cab off the rank was *KISS Pinball*. Superb game. In the Seventies the band had their own pinball table and it was a doozy. Unlike most of the cheap cash-ins they exploited, this was actually decent. The videogame version on PC and PlayStation was excellent. Or so I thought. I just went to read some reviews from back in the day and they come down on it hard. "*KISS Pinball* serves no purpose whatsoever. KISS fans will be disappointed by the distinct lack of KISS and pinball fans will be disappointed by the distinct lack of pinball."

Ouch. I either misremembered or my love for the make-up wearing divvies made me blind to the gameplay. But that can't be true. Because I do remember the other game, *KISS: Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child* on the Dreamcast being absolutely one of the worst games I have ever had the misfortune to play. I mean just awful. Similar in this respect to anything KISS made in this period (excluding *Crazy, Crazy Nights*. *God Gave Rock And Roll To You II* came out in '91 before you start writing in).

It was some dungeon crawler fantasy game that had very few KISS references. If you reached a door you'd get a snatch of *Rock And Roll All Nite* and you had to collect some platform boots and a guitar and… ah man, I don't know what. It was one of those games that as soon as I'd played it twice I never went back to it.

Except I did recently go back to it. Twenty-four years later I streamed me playing it. And here's the thing… IT WAS AMAZING! A game ahead of its time.

Only joking… actually it was still flippin' awful.

So what do we take away from my scientific research? That while the first five albums might be decent, they sure knew how to make some absolute stinkers when it came to games. *

> "In the Seventies the band had their own pinball table and it was a doozy"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

PCSPECIALIST
BUILT FOR YOU. READY FOR ANYTHING.
www.pcspecialist.co.uk
Get an exclusive £15 discount with Retro Gamer using code RTG25

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Fighting isn't for everyone

Barbarian. Yie Ar Kung-Fu. International Karate +. I was hopeless at all of them. Thankfully, my school wasn't especially preoccupied with fighting games. The main game my classmates got obsessed with was something they made up; *Calculator Olympics*. They'd press one-plus-plus-equals on a calculator, and then have to get to 100 faster than other players. [Just did it in 13 seconds – Ed]

It became a huge thing one year, with league tables and rows of calculators lined up on desks at lunchtimes, and pupils tapping away like lunatics.

I was useless at that too, but that was OK because my mates and I had come up with another game where we had to take turns jumping over an open drain while the other players threw their schoolbags at us. Unfortunately, this game was given a permanent suspension when Arron Cox fell down the drain and ended up in hospital with a busted shin.

If I wasn't so old, and had been at school a few years later, I'd have been there during the era of *Street Fighter II*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Tekken* et al. An era, I assume with very little first-hand evidence, whereby your social standing in the playground directly correlated to your ability to make Chun-Li do a Spinning Bird Kick. I dodged a bullet; I was enough of a weird kid already that I really didn't need additional reasons to be ostracised.

During the years I wrote *Digitiser*, my awfulness at one-on-one fighting games was kind of my dark secret. As a professional games journalist, I felt I had to hide my ineptitude from our readers.

It wasn't for the want of trying. I tried so hard to master special moves, but being able to remember the button combinations in the heat of combat simply didn't work with my particular brain configuration.

I could win matches by accident through button mashing – I mean, to a casual observer, that's all the skilled player of *Street Fighter II* is doing anyway. The fact I could win matches that way hasn't entirely convinced me that it isn't what 'skilled players' of *Street Fighter II* actually are doing…

Scrolling beat-'em-ups were much more my jam, mainly because you didn't have to remember and perfect the button combinations to get the most out of them. I'm pretty good at those. I'd still enjoy playing fighting games, but I'd nevertheless find myself feeling I was missing out. I was never getting the full experience. I wanted to see the Fatalities in *Mortal Kombat*, but had to rely on my opponents – computerised or otherwise – inflicting them upon me.

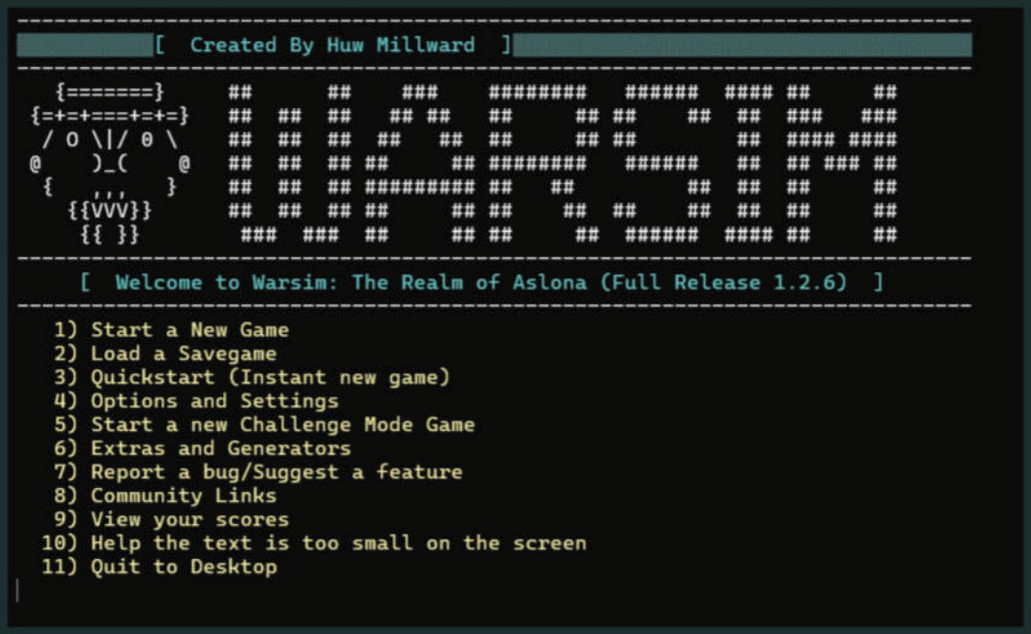
Nevertheless, I think the one-on-one fighting game golden age was kind of the dawn of gaming's risible 'git gud' culture. I don't want to offend anyone here – and given the nature of this well-respected publication, I would hope you're all mature enough to be past such things – but it was kind of the first time I remember anyone looking down on those who were less good than they were at a specific genre of game.

Anyone who does that is an idiot. It's a reductive mentality I never could relate to; basing your self-worth on a set of entirely pointless life skills. A Dragon Suplex might look good on an episode of *GamesMaster* or a Sony Battle Bus, but how far is that going to get you in the apocalypse? ✱

> "During the years I wrote Digitiser, my awfulness at one-on-one fighting games was kind of my dark secret"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

WANT TO KNOW HOW A GAME THAT LOOKS LIKE THIS HAS SOLD OVER 100K COPIES ON STEAM?


[Created By Huw Millward]
[Welcome to Warsim: The Realm of Aslona (Full Release 1.2.6)]
1) Start a New Game
2) Load a Savegame
3) Quickstart (Instant new game)
4) Options and Settings
5) Start a new Challenge Mode Game
6) Extras and Generators
7) Report a bug/Suggest a feature
8) Community Links
9) View your scores
10) Help the text is too small on the screen
11) Quit to Desktop

- Over 150 free updates, adding more than 10,000 new features.
- Rated Overwhelmingly Positive by players.
- Thousands of throne room events, each one unique.
- Over 94 million procedurally generated fantasy races to discover.
- Trillions of random faces possible, thanks to 40+ face generator tools.
- An evolving arena that can be owned, ruled, and used to host tournaments of all kinds.
- Mountains of mini-games and hidden features waiting to be explored.
- And so much more – even I can't remember it all (it's been a long 9 years, folks!)

I reply to nearly every comment across our community, so don't be a stranger!

Warsim: The Realm of Aslona, 9 years in solo development!
Available on Steam, Itch.io and GOG

Scan this with your phone, or search Warsim in google!

Also out now our physical Collector's Edition on Warsimstore.com

» The GAMMDome: telling the story of video and computer games.

» Marco Accordi Rickards is GAMM's director, "People can fall in love with games and understand their value only if they experience them with their hands."

GAMM Game Museum

Steve Boxer visits Rome's newly opened, world-class videogames museum

In case you needed an excuse to visit the great city of Rome, how about this: it now has a world-class videogames museum that you can explore. Called GAMM Game Museum, it's in the very centre of the city, on the Piazza della Repubblica, and is stuffed with retro-gaming artefacts – a Magnavox Odyssey rubs shoulders with the original *Doom* master disks and cartridges dug up from Atari's notorious *ET* landfill. We got museum director Marco Accordi Rickards to talk us through it all.

So how did GAMM come into being, Marco?

We opened a game museum for the first time in Rome in 2012 under the name Vigamus. Then after 12 years, we decided to improve it with a completely different concept. So GAMM is the evolution of Vigamus. With Vigamus, we had much more limited resources; my original idea was closer to this one, but it was impossible to do. The most important variation between Vigamus and GAMM is the integration of virtual and physical, to have an ever-changing dynamic – to be able to tell the new stories of games and put in new content.

Can you talk us through the three distinct areas of GAMM?

The GAMMDome is probably the most important part, because it is where we combine the physical with the digital to tell stories about the games industry. We had the idea not to use traditional print panels, but two layers of screens. On the lower one, you have the panels telling all the different stories, and on the upper ones, we alternate interviews between relevant people from the games industry with specific interviews made by us for GAMM, and some video about the games. So, for example, when we talk about the first console war between Atari and Mattel, we show video of some of the popular games on the old consoles. The second area is PARC: Path Of Arcadia, charting the history of arcade machines between 1978 and 1984 up to their Nineties revival – some games are original and some are legal emulations. The third area we call the HIP: Historical Playground. This is important because it is dedicated to the original element of games compared to other media: gameplay. Specifically, the way in which game designers construct forms of interaction – it's the games' language, at the end of the day.

» The PARC area of GAMM is where you'll discover classic arcade machines like *Donkey Kong*.

» A collection of handheld games: we particularly like the look of *Space Laser Fight*.

» One of Marco's favourite parts of GAMM is its impressive Infocom collection.

For you personally, what are your favourite exhibits that are currently featured?
My personal favourite parts, because they are most connected to what I loved when I first started playing games, are two. One is the part dedicated to Infocom, because I particularly love text adventures, especially the Infocom ones – but not only those, also ones from Scott Adams and other companies. But probably in my heart, the number one area shows the Intellivision. That is why our inaugural guest this year, and the first person we have put in our hall of fame, is Don Daglow, who will come here from the United States for GAMM's launch. He was the director of development for Mattel Intellivision – the Blue Sky Rangers. I loved that console.

And what would you most like to get that GAMM doesn't yet have? Maybe a *Computer Space* system?
Yes, *Computer Space* would be a very beautiful item to display. But there is something else we don't have enough space for. I would like to have a special physical exhibition of the old LaserDisc arcade games, like *Dragon's Lair* and all the other ones. Because they are strange videogames; they are not even real videogames, if you think about it. But they are still very fascinating when you see someone playing them. There are so many things we would like to have; we have a tiny portion of all the wonders of games.

The clever two-screen system in the GAMMDome means you can constantly reconfigure what is on show in the museum. How important do you think that design decision was?
We like the fact that we can continue working on this project, so it's not something where we have to fill a box 100 percent, then we open it and it's done. It's something which is ever-changing, and for us, it's a big challenge. If we see something really interesting, we can focus on that and try to contact those developers. Study is part of this – if something new is happening, we can try to make a new exhibition of it.

We have a centralised system in the GAMMDome which connects all the screens together, so for example, we can have a special moment where all the screens display the same media. We are in the process of studying the possibilities we have to offer for special events and things like that. I always compare this to a classic situation of the games industry – it's like when a new console comes out. I was thinking about the PlayStation 2 because we have a similar development cycle: when it's very difficult in the beginning and the games are not so good – like *FantaVision*. And then at the end of the lifecycle of the console you have things like *God Of War*. Right now, we are in that early stage, of course. ✱

» Fancy a photo-op with a Big Daddy and Little Sister from *BioShock*?

» Mattel's Intellivision seemed innovative at the time with its membrane controllers.

> "GAMM is something which is ever-changing, and for us, that's a big challenge"
>
> **MARCO ACCORDI RICKARDS**

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

» [Xbox 360] There's one rule to *Alone In The Dark* – if in doubt, set it on fire.

AUGUST 2008 – It might be bright outside, but Atari wants you isolated in a pitch black space. We've also got red cars, Japanese zombies and golf. Nick Thorpe is time travelling to rescue himself from retail work, but he's got old news for you lucky lot too

NEWS AUGUST 2008

On 1 August, war between Russia and Georgia broke out, with Russia backing separatist forces in the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Though the conflict lasted only 16 days as French president Nicolas Sarkozy brokered a ceasefire, Georgia lost control of the territories, which declared themselves republics – recognised by only a few other countries.

The 2008 Summer Olympic Games took place in Beijing, China from 8-24 August. The event saw China top the medal table for the first time, winning 48 gold medals and 100 total. The USA and Russia followed in second and third, with Great Britain recording its best medal tally in a century to take fourth place. Notable feats included American swimmer Michael Phelps taking a record eight gold medals in a single Olympic Games, and Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt setting world records in both the 100m and 200m events.

American singer Isaac Hayes passed away at the age of 65 on 10 August. Hayes was an iconic figure in soul music and also won a best original song Oscar for *Theme From Shaft* in 1971. In later years, he was famed for his portrayal of Chef in the animated comedy series *South Park*.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 2008

With the summer lull kicking in, there were only a couple of big releases this month. *Alone In The Dark* rebooted the original survival horror series, and you'd certainly be left in the dark after reading reviews of it. The Xbox 360 version received 8/10 from *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, 7/10 from *Edge*, 6/10 from *X360*, 5/10 from *games™* and 2/5 from *360*, with the PC release earning 6/10 from *Total PC Gaming* and 39% from *PC Gamer*. *OXM* felt it to be "visually arresting" and "almost entirely gripping from start to finish", whereas *360* complained of "dodgy collision detection" as well as "sluggish controls and stilted gameplay". The PS2 release shared the story of the other versions but none of the gameplay, and scored 59% in *Play* and 4/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine*, with the former complaining of frequent deaths "due to a cocktail of trial-and-error progression and shoddy camera work".

» [PlayStation 3] A rumour that we just made up says this inspired *I'm On A Boat* by The Lonely Island.

The other big release of the month was *Battlefield: Bad Company*, a console entry in the tactical shooter series. It received decent scores on both Xbox 360 and PS3, including 8/10 from *games™*, 78% from *Play* and 7/10 each from *OXM*, *OPM*, *X360* and *Edge*. "Any student of action gaming will find much to admire in *Bad Company*," said *games™* – but it complained that, "DICE offers a brief taste of a *Battlefield* game driven by story and characters, where the completion of objectives signifies more than reaching a dot on the radar without dying, but delivers a product that leaves you feeling much the same as any of its ancestors." Concluding, the magazine said, "If it wasn't so good, we might even be upset."

Over on the PS3, which was yet to receive its version of *Alone In The Dark*, *Siren: Blood Curse*

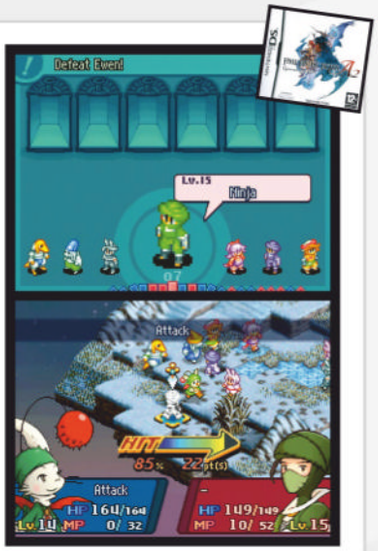
was there to sate survival horror fans, so long as they were happy to enjoy only the first three of its downloadable episodes. The remake of the PS2 game *Forbidden Siren* changed plenty of details but retained the series' signature 'sight-jacking' feature that allows you to see through the eyes of the monsters. *Edge* and *OPM* both gave the initial episodes 8/10, with the latter commenting that, "Nothing else in the survival horror canon compares to the soaring terror of seeing a murderous blood-eyed zombie shambling closer to your hiding place *through their eyes*."

Elsewhere, Xbox 360 owners could enjoy a somewhat belated port of *Unreal Tournament 3*, which earned 9/10 from both *OXM* and *X360*, and 4/5 from *360*. PS3 racing fans could try out *Ferrari Challenge: Trofeo Pirelli*, which was praised as "a serious, focussed and for the most part excellent sim that's more dynamic than *Gran Turismo Prologue*" in an 8/10 review in *OPM*. *Edge* gave it 7/10, saying that it "boasts one of the most flexible driving models in the genre" and that it was "rich in content for those prepared to navigate its obtuse structure".

On the Wii, the most exciting release of the month was Capcom's *We Love Golf!* – a light-hearted game from Camelot, the developer of the popular *Mario Golf* series. Though Wii owners may already have had *Wii Sports*, Capcom's new golf game offered more in the way of fantasy courses, as well as opportunities to dress up as numerous *Street Fighter* characters. *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave the game 85% in a head-to-head review against *Super Swing Golf*, saying that it, "Gets the nod for its accessible controls and online gameplay," but that it was "more about multiplayer". It also received 8/10 from *games™* which called it "the best-made golf game on the system".

Handheld Nintendo fans could enjoy *Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire Of The Rift*, which was a direct DS follow-up to the GBA entry in the strategy RPG series. Comparing it to the original *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Edge* felt that *A2* "offers a more lightweight narrative, perhaps, but also a more coherent and robust expanse of strategic possibilities" and scored it 8/10. *ONM* awarded it 87%. Also on the DS, *Bakushow* was a party game that required players to set each other drawing challenges. The game scored 7/10 in *games™*, 80% in *ONM* and 8/10 in *nRevolution*, which explained that, "There are no real rules, so the creativity stems from the imagination of the group."

Join us again next month, when we'll have some good games and also *Braid*... ✱



» [DS] If you've got plenty of time to kill, *Final Fantasy Tactics A2* is a perfect way to do it.

» [PlayStation 3] Zombies and hospitals? No thanks, *Siren: Blood Curse*. Go ruin someone else's day.

» [Wii] For some reason, Capcom's vision of combining cosplay and golf never took off at conventions.

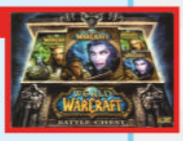
CHARTS

AUGUST 2008

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **Grand Theft Auto IV** (Rockstar)
2 – **Haze** (Ubisoft)
3 – **Race Driver: GRID** (Codemasters)
4 – **Gran Turismo 5 Prologue** (Sony)
5 – **FIFA 08** (EA)

PC



1 – **World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest** (Sierra)
2 – **The Sims 2: Free Time** (EA)
3 – **Civilization IV Complete** (2K Games)
4 – **Mass Effect** (EA)
5 – **Sins Of A Solar Empire** (Kalypso Media)

DS

1 – **Dr Kawashima's Brain Training** (Nintendo)
2 – **Cooking Guide** (Nintendo)
3 – **Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers Of Darkness** (Nintendo)
4 – **Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games** (Sega)
5 – **Kung Fu Panda** (Activision)

MUSIC

1 – **I Kissed A Girl** (Katy Perry)
2 – **All Summer Long** (Kid Rock)
3 – **The Man Who Can't Be Moved** (Script)
4 – **Love Is Noise** (Verve)
5 – **Dance Wiv Me** (Dizzee Rascal feat. Calvin Harris & Chrome)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official Nintendo Magazine

Reader Patricia Gouveia asks, "What's the deal with the last issue of your mag and all the hating on Sonic?" The team claims that the jabs are "just a bit of fun" and point out that "the lad's appeared on five of our covers!".

Edge

"There are only two games I consider masterpieces: *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*," says film director Guillermo del Toro, who thinks the *GTA IV* engine is beautiful despite being "not into break-ins or running people over".

Play

The magazine asks, "Why should we even care about *Street Fighter IV*?" It notes that *Street Fighter III* was "ignored by pretty much everyone except for the rabid, half-drunk, stick-fiddling fanboys (ie Tim Empey)". That's not very kind, is it?

Nifty Lifty

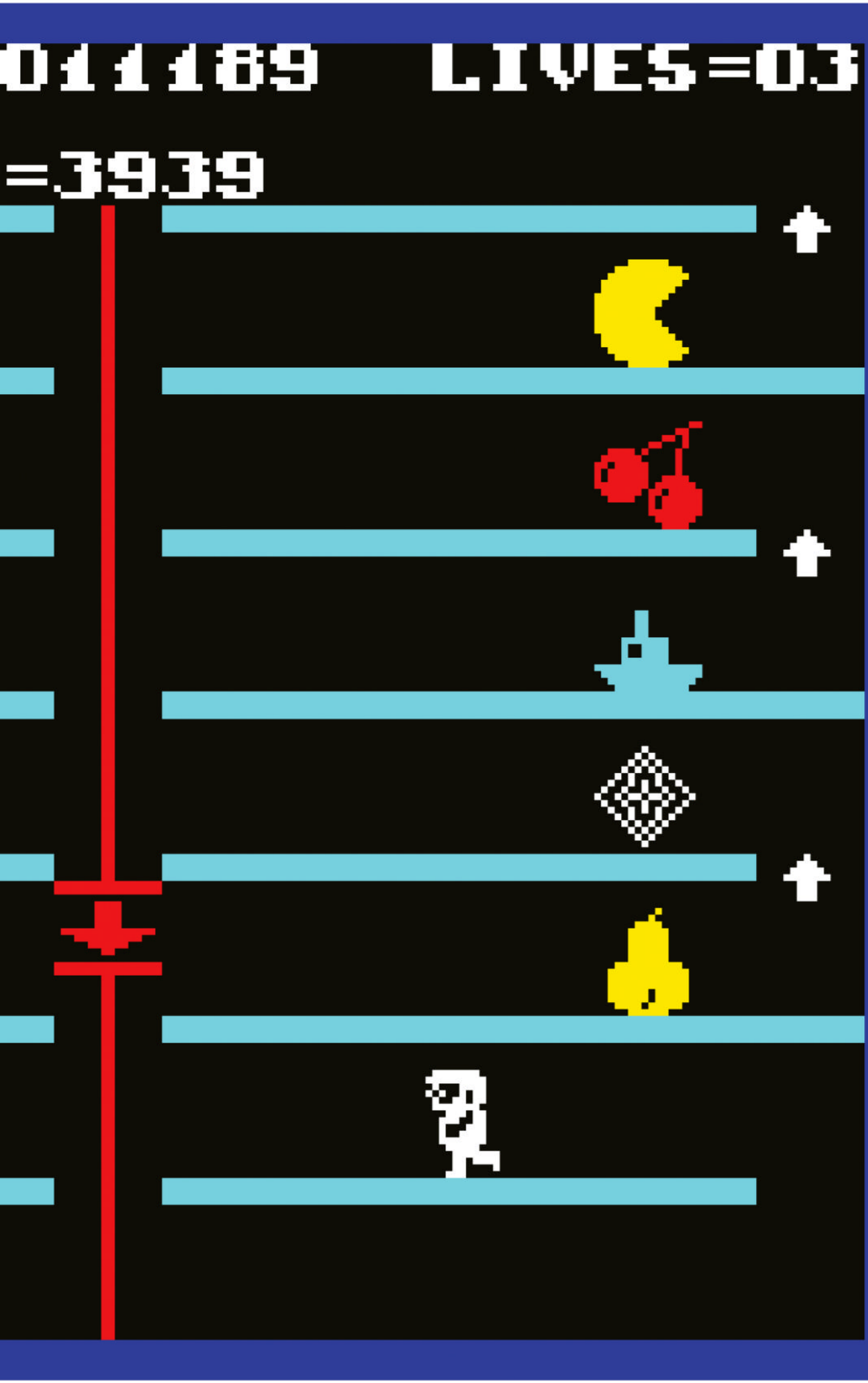
A DIFFERENT KIND OF NOSTALGIA

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1984 » KEVIN J BEZANT

My last job before I started working on Retro Gamer involved managing a meetings venue, so the levels of activity varied wildly – sometimes we'd have a building full of people, but often it would just be me and my manager Sarah sitting in the office together. I didn't mind that because we got on well, as we're of similar ages and could trade stories of the odd things our parents would do. Every so often, conversations would turn to games. Sarah wasn't the biggest gamer, but she had grown up with a SNES, and of course since I was a Sega kid there was a little back and forth over the superior version of *Aladdin*.

However, the game I always associate most with Sarah is *Nifty Lifty*, a platformer in which your goal is to reach the top of the screen without getting hit by the lifts that move up and down the centre of the screen. I can't actually remember if Sarah had actually owned a Spectrum or not, but for some reason the game had stuck with her – I think it was the name, more than anything else – and it ended up sticking with me too.

Every time I think of the game, I end up thinking of my old colleague. I thought of Sarah when the entire office ignored *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* to watch Darran playing *Nifty Lifty* on the ZX Spectrum Vega, and it was with her in mind that I put it into the ZX Spectrum Minority Report in issue 266. Of course, it's there on merit – despite being a pretty simple game, I have good fun every time I play it – but I do think my experience is enhanced by my fond memories of the chats the two of us would have to get through the slower afternoons in that small office. ✱


01189 LIVES=03
=3939

CAPCOM'S GREATEST FIGHTING GAMES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

IN THE EARLY NINETIES, CAPCOM TURNED ONE-ON-ONE COMBAT INTO AN ARCADE PHENOMENON, AND IT TOOK A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FIGHTING GENRE THAT IT MAINTAINS TO THIS DAY. JOIN US FOR A LOOK BACK AT THE COMPANY'S WORK IN THE FIELD OF FISTICUFFS, AS WE GIVE OUT AWARDS TO THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST OF ITS GAMES

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

STREET FIGHTER II

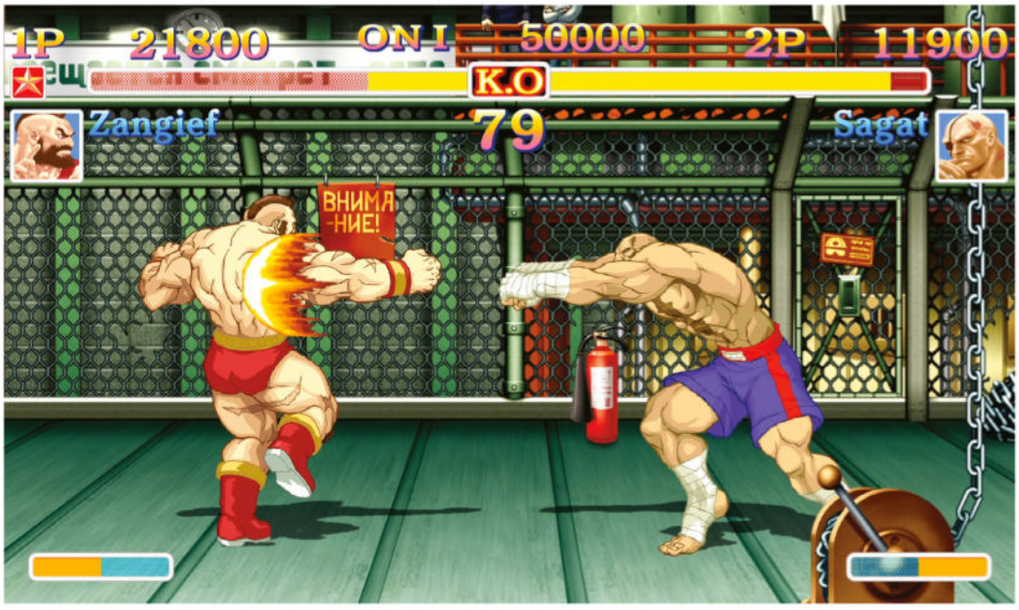
1991-2017

Sometimes, there's a game so big that it's impossible to talk around – you simply have to address it before any other conversation can take place. That's the situation with Capcom's fighting games and *Street Fighter II*. While it wasn't the developer's first foray into the fighting arena, it is far and away the most consequential, the foundation upon which the company's later works and indeed, much of the rest of the fighting game world is built upon. Having a choice of eight selectable characters was revolutionary in 1991, as was the combo system that famously started life as an accidental feature.

Another major feature of *Street Fighter II* was the way that Capcom sought to keep it fresh with regular updates – these made the bosses playable, enabled mirror matches, increased the game speed and eventually added new characters and the concept of the Super Combo. *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* remained a competitive mainstay for many years, but Capcom has revisited the game a few times since then, most recently with *Ultra Street Fighter II: The Final Challengers* some 26 years after the game's arcade debut. Players still love *Street Fighter II*, and so they should – there will never be another quite like it.

» [Arcade] The classic cast of *Street Fighter II* characters are among the most recognisable in gaming history.

» [Arcade] Following player demand, Capcom followed up with updates that kept the game fresh for years.



» [Switch] *Ultra Street Fighter II* accompanied the launch of the Switch in 2017, with classic and updated visual options.

PLAYING FOR GENERATIONS

THE FIGHTERS GENERATION WEBMASTER FRANK JOSEPH ON CAPCOM'S FIGHTING PROWESS

How did you first encounter Capcom's fighting games?
I grew up in Tampa, Florida, and it was a great place to be a gamer, with lots of free-standing arcades. I absolutely played *Street Fighter* at the arcade – I remember a regular joystick and buttons, not the one that you smashed – and then *Street Fighter II* changed everything, just reinvented the entire competitive scene. Every *Street Fighter* game after that, I played religiously.

As Capcom diversified its fighting games beyond *Street Fighter*, were there any others that you particularly enjoyed?
Well, that would definitely be *Marvel Vs Capcom* and the whole *Versus* series. I remember how powerful it was to just see a huge crowd around the machine. *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, especially in the Tampa area – I mean, we would go to these arcades and there would always be someone there for like decades to play these games. The same guys every weekend, year after year after year, just playing *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*.

Why do you think Capcom has been able to maintain leadership in the fighting genre for so long?
In my mind, just the success of the original games in so many ways was smart console ports, playable console ports – if we actually practised at home, it would pay off at the arcades. [*Tekken* producer] Katsuhiro Harada, a few years back, talked about the feel of a character and how to design a character around that. I think about particular characters like Urien and Akuma in *3rd Strike* that I really like, it's so powerful – you want to actually press Start to play that character, just the way it feels and the mind games and the combos. On that deep level as a player, it always calls me back.

» [SNES] Ryu aims for Rolento, one of the newcomers in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*

» [SNES] When a ninja and a punk walk into a public loo, fighting is practically inevitable.

» [SNES] The masses of bikes in Chun-Li's stage survive the transition, and still move along.

IMPOSSIBLE PORT AWARD

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2

1996

The 16-bit generation was old news by the time the middle child of the *Street Fighter Alpha* series was ready to head to home consoles, and the first versions appeared for the PlayStation and Saturn. It might have been logical to assume that the shiny new Nintendo 64 would be next, but Capcom wanted to target the largest possible audience. As a result, the stunning decision was made to convert the state-of-the-art fighter to the ageing SNES, with the developer delivering the game to Japanese players just seven months after its arcade release. The SNES version of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* is a surprisingly faithful conversion, containing all 18 regular characters and all of their moves, playing just as well as you'd hope. It even includes most of the backgrounds, though it is missing a couple of secret character variants. This is all possible because the cartridge includes the S-DD1 chip for decompression of graphical data, squeezing as much use as possible from the 32Mb ROM. While the game does suffer from occasional pauses for audio loading and it's overshadowed by versions on other platforms, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* on the SNES was remarkably respectable for the players using more modest hardware.

PARTY STARTER AWARD

POWER STONE 2

2000

After years of traditional fighting games, the original *Power Stone* was a welcome change to the formula. It was still one-on-one, but the freedom of movement in 3D arenas and the variety of weapons at your disposal were unlike anything else in the genre. However, when *Power Stone 2* came along and cranked up the craziness to new levels, it clearly marked its place as Capcom's best fighter for party games. The most obvious way it did so was by adding support for four-player battles, instantly making the game feel far more chaotic than its predecessor.

However, that wasn't all – stages now had even more interactivity built in. You might suddenly find yourself falling through the sky and scrambling for an umbrella, or trying to scale a large castle before your rivals, and you could even jump into little tanks or huge gun turrets in an attempt to take out your foes. All the while, the game remains accessible to newcomers as moves don't use directional inputs and are therefore very simple to execute. Popular with both regular fighting game fans and those who normally avoid the genre, this is sure to be a hit at any multiplayer night.

» [Dreamcast] With turrets aplenty and bits falling off, the airship stage is a hazardous place to be.

» [Dreamcast] Quick, climb the castle or get left out in the cold! A little platforming is required here.

RIDICULOUS ROSTER AWARD

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES

2000

A three-on-three tag team fighting game needs a large character roster to avoid getting stale quickly, and Capcom duly delivered with *Marvel Vs Capcom 2,* an overstuffed delight of a game which features 56 characters. While the likes of Spider-Man, Wolverine, Captain America and Hulk were always easy to recognise, time has only enhanced the value of some of the other Marvel members of the cast – the likes of Iron Man, Cable and Thanos have benefitted from movie fame since the game was released. There's also room for some characters that weren't so well known at the time, with Marrow and Shuma-Gorath standing out as examples.

On the Capcom side of things, it's no surprise to see *Street Fighter* mainstays like Ryu, Chun-Li and Akuma, and the *Darkstalkers* contingent including Morrigan, Felicia and Anakaris was equally expected. However, Capcom brought in deep cuts like *Star Gladiator*'s Hayato Kanzaki, and looked beyond its typical fighters – Tron Bonne and Servbot bolster the *Mega Man* representation, *Resident Evil*'s Jill Valentine joins the fray, and SonSon is a throwback to the company's arcade classics. There are even original characters, the pirate Ruby Heart and cactus dude Amingo. Such a massive roster inevitably proved tricky to balance, so some characters are definitely more viable than others, but you certainly won't get bored trying to find your favourites.

» [Dreamcast] Here's Ruby Heart, the brand-new pirate character designed just for this game.

HONORARY MEMBER AWARD

SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

1999

This crossover fighting game is the first to ever pit Capcom's combatants against the warriors of SNK. It has Capcom in the name and it's full of Capcom characters. However, unlike all of the other games in this feature, Capcom neither developed nor published the game. Those duties fell to SNK, which promoted this game as a flagship title for its Neo Geo Pocket Color console.

SNK had pretty much mastered the art of developing fighting games that you could take on the bus, and delivered the most feature-packed handheld fighter ever seen to that point. The game's 26 characters included a mixture of *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalkers* characters for the Capcom side, and they could face off in solo battles, *King Of Fighters*-style three-on-three team battles and highly impressive tag team matches. There are even three styles of Super Meter to choose from, and a selection of minigames for when you tired of fighting – one of which features Arthur from the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* series.

BEYOND ONE-ON-ONE

WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THE SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UPS

FINAL FIGHT

»1989

Final Fight was the next big advance in its genre after *Double Dragon,* and clearly inspired the *Streets Of Rage* series. *Final Fight*'s story has now been absorbed into the *Street Fighter* canon, with both the heroes and villains joining the roster starting from *Street Fighter Alpha.*

ALIEN VS PREDATOR

»1994

This licensed arcade brawler allows for up to three players to take on the Xenomorph threat, playing as either cyborg soldiers or Predators. It's a great-looking game that offers plenty in the way of carnage, but the Capcom Home Arcade still counts as the game's only official home release.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA

»1996

Drawing on staple RPG mechanics such as buying items, changing equipment and casting magic, this beat-'em-up stands out from the usual crowd. The Saturn version is expensive, but the 2013 digital compilation *Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara* is still available on Xbox and Steam.

VIEWTIFUL JOE

»2003

While it's a bit different from the classic examples of the genre, *Viewtiful Joe* reinvigorated the template with special VFX powers that draw upon the game's movie theme. With lovely cel-shaded graphics and a ton of charm, this is one to consider next time you want to dish out some pain.

AMAZING ANIMATION AWARD

STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

1999

Of all the games in this feature, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* is perhaps the one that has benefitted the most from retrospective reappraisal. When it arrived in 1999, *Street Fighter* fatigue was a real phenomenon and 2D games were unfashionable. It took some years and *that* Daigo parry to turn opinions around, but these days it's recognised for being a *Street Fighter* game with a distinctive cast and great gameplay, and one with an excellent soundtrack to boot.

However, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* is notable for being one of the most beautiful 2D games ever made. Part of that is down to the detailed backgrounds, but Capcom was particularly proud of the enormous amount of animation frames the CPS-3 arcade board could deliver – so much so that final boss Gill was designed to demonstrate that sprite flipping was unnecessary. The result is that the character animation really steals the show, as every fighter moves with a fluidity that had never been seen in fighting games before – and has rarely been seen since. From Elena's dancing to Twelve's twisting limbs, there are so many beautiful motions in this game that just wouldn't be the same if Capcom hadn't gone wild on the animation.

» [Arcade] Elena lands an elegant high kick on the rather odd creature known as Twelve.

» [Arcade] You can just see the force that Hugo is putting into that torture rack backbreaker.

» [PlayStation] Regardless of the version you buy, *Rival Schools* remains a great fighting game.

» [PlayStation] The simulation mode really isn't going to be of much use to those who can't read Japanese.

» [PlayStation] Ah yes, English penalty taking technique. Best in the world, don't you know.

BETTER IN JAPAN AWARD

RIVAL SCHOOLS: UNITED BY FATE

1997

It was always a memorable day whenever a fight broke out at school. Kids gathered in a circle, chanting, "Fight! Fight! Fight!" as they craned their necks for a view of the awkward lunging punches, before the inevitable intervention of a teacher put an end to the playground pugilism. Capcom's school-themed scrapper is just as memorable, not only for being one of the company's early 3D fighters, but for its tag team action and an aversion to taking itself too seriously. If you're scared of trying new characters, Sakura from the *Street Fighter* series is even present as a cameo.

The Japanese players got an expanded home conversion on the PlayStation that included the Evolution Disc, full of extra modes. Among them were a selection of minigames like penalty kick and home run contests, as well as the School Life mode – a character creation mode that took the form of a dating sim. While the Evolution disc was included in both the North American and PAL versions of *Rival Schools*, the minigame and dating sim modes above were completely cut from the game, leaving Japanese players with the better release. A similar situation happened with its Dreamcast sequel, *Project Justice: Rival Schools 2*.

THE LORE LORD SPEAKS

STREET FIGHTER STORY EXPERT STEVEN MANE DISCUSSES WHAT MAKES CAPCOM'S FIGHTING GAMES SPECIAL

You take a different approach from many fighting game enthusiasts in focussing on lore – how has Capcom done well with this over the years?

Because of system limitations back in the day, we were only allowed a tiny snippet of each character's life to truly explore, but as we've progressed in gaming technology, more detailed stories could be told. In *Street Fighter*, we began to learn about Ryu's fight with himself, Guile's grief over Charlie Nash's death and Cammy's dark past as an agent for Shadaloo. Capcom has managed to handle the complicated lore relatively well by using what they need for their games versus what they can put in supplementals (manga, encyclopaedias, etc) for future story building.

Which games would you highlight as being key advances in the way Capcom presents its fighting game stories?

The *Street Fighter Alpha* series, and in particular *Alpha 3*, was the first chance for Capcom to really branch the story out and truly create a living world. Character-specific introductions, rival battles, and in-match dialogue became staples of the series, and over time influenced other fighting games as well. In the *Street Fighter IV* series, we got everything we could want: character-specific dialogue, rival battles with build-up, cinematic stories and Juri Han. Outside of *Street Fighter*, though, *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes* was able to tie the Marvel characters' stories and the Capcom characters' stories together and allow them to interact with each other in ways that we just haven't seen since.

Why do you think the *Street Fighter* cast meshes so well with other properties for crossover projects?

For a crossover to work, both properties need to have an established fanbase that at least has a passing interest in the other work. Ryu and Chun-Li have just as much name recognition and respect as Spider-Man and Storm because gamers grew up with all of them. More so, just like the superheroes in comics, we see the characters in *Street Fighter* go through the challenges of learning their own powers and special moves while simply trying to live their lives. Quite simply, their character designs make them feel that much more real to us and is a testament to the artists who created them in bringing them to life.

CAPTIVATING COMPILATION AWARD

CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION

2022

There have been some very good Capcom fighting game compilations in the past, so this wasn't an easy award to pick, and it's actually a rather recent one that gets the nod. They say that variety is the spice of life, and that's why we've gone for ***Capcom Fighting Collection*** – a ten-game compilation for Switch, PS4, Xbox One and PC. The bulk of the collection comprises the *Darkstalkers* arcade games – the original, *Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge*, *Darkstalkers 3* and its two Japan-only updates, *Vampire Hunter 2* and *Vampire Savior 2*. Fans of fights and frights should be rather pleased with that.

The rest of the collection is rather more eclectic. *Pocket Fighter* has miniature characters but packs a mighty punch with its crossover cast, *Hyper Street Fighter II* is there to deliver familiar thrills, and *Cyberbots: Full Metal Madness* is an entertaining robot rumble that lets you customise your machine with different parts. The CPS-3 fighting game *Red Earth* gets its first home port here, and returns to the early days of the genre with a limited selection of player characters and a wider variety of CPU-exclusive fighters. If you get bored of those, batter a friend in the excellent *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* instead.

» [Switch] *Darkstalkers* fans should enjoy this – after all, it's not like they're acknowledged often.

» [Saturn] Guile is exclusive to the home versions of *Street Fighter Alpha 3*.

» [PlayStation] It's Ken on Ken action in the World Tour mode – Barbie is thrilled.

» [Game Boy Advance] This is a game that has no right being as good on Nintendo's handheld as it is.

BEST HOME PORTS AWARD

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

1998

The concluding entry in the *Street Fighter Alpha* series was pretty great as an arcade game, but the home versions really pushed the boat out in terms of content, and were designed to make use of each console's specific features. The initial PlayStation version admittedly suffered from animation cuts and long loading times, but it did bring back a bunch of extra characters including Fei Long and Guile. Better yet, the World Tour mode presented the opportunity to customise your fighter to take on a variety of missions, adding plenty of longevity for solo players, and Japanese players even got PocketStation support. The Dreamcast version retained the additional features of the PlayStation version, minus the PocketStation support, and the second Japanese release added online multiplayer. The Saturn version actually released after that as the penultimate new game for the console, and it was a stunning conversion that used the 4MB RAM cartridge to present the most arcade-accurate experience so far, with World Tour and extra characters included.

The Game Boy Advance version by Crawfish was another port that felt like it shouldn't have been possible at all, never mind with extra features, but it added Eagle, Maki and Yun to the roster – all of whom stayed for the PSP version, where they were joined by Ingrid from *Capcom Fighting Jam*.

» [Arcade] Ryu's taken some supplements, so he's not coming to the superhero fight with any Hadoken envy.

» [Arcade] Zangief said he was a "red hot hunk of burning love" but we don't think he quite meant it like this.

OVER-THE-TOP AWARD

X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER

1996

While the *Street Fighter* roster already possessed superhuman abilities, their standard moves simply weren't going to cut it in a crossover with legitimate superheroes. Capcom's solution was simple – turn everything up to 11. Being able to somersault over another human being was no longer enough, now fighters could leap three times the height of the screen and perform deadly combos in the air. Projectile attacks that had once seemed like adequate super moves were suddenly consigned to the bin, replaced with screen-filling beams.

X-Men Vs Street Fighter was one of the earliest fighting games to employ tag team gameplay, which gave the game a relentless pace as characters switched in and out frequently – and of course, both members of a team could unleash their Super Moves at once. The game even squeezed in some crazy background moments, with players able to be smashed through the floor into the sewers in Manhattan. It was a landmark game that sowed the seeds for the chaos of *Marvel Vs Capcom*.

PERFECT PRESENTATION AWARD

CAPCOM VS SNK: MILLENNIUM FIGHT 2000

2000

Would it be fair to say that *Capcom Vs SNK* is one of the most stylish games ever made? We certainly think so. It seemed as though the landmark crossover gave Capcom's developers the desire to rethink the way that its fighting games were presented, and the game really does feel like an event as a result. The way the camera sweeps through 3D corridors as you move between selecting your Groove and the unusual tilted character select screen, the way the character portraits reflect the Groove you chose as you select your team order – it looked cool then, and it looks cool now. The excellent presentational touches extend to the fights, too. While many of the Capcom characters do reuse their sprites, the new sprites for the SNK characters are excellent. Each stage has a little intro, from simple things like panning up from a puddle rippling with raindrops to our favourite – a retro racing game sequence that culminates in a crash, setting the scene for a fight against the backdrop of a raging inferno. The soundtrack fits right in with the overall look of the game too, creating an atmosphere that even its own sequel couldn't match.

» [Dreamcast] Boom – there goes the traffic accident, and now we've got some interesting scenery to fight against.

UNLIKELIEST CROSSOVER AWARD

TATSUNOKO VS CAPCOM: ULTIMATE ALL-STARS

2008

Being completely honest, we were rather more familiar with one side of this crossover than the other. While the likes of Gatchaman and Yatterman are names that we had heard of, we would be lying if we said that we knew much beyond that when this most unexpected of crossover games was announced. "But **Retro Gamer**," we hear you cry, "Tatsunoko Production is a big deal in Japan, so isn't this award simply a case of cultural bias?" That's a good question, but the answer is no.

Really, you have to look at Capcom's other crossovers to understand why this felt so far out of left-field. It makes perfect sense that Capcom would create a crossover using its own fighting properties, as in *Pocket Fighter* and *Capcom Fighting Jam*. Crossing over with other prominent fighting game series, as in *Capcom Vs SNK* and *Street Fighter X Tekken*, is also not far-fetched. Meanwhile, Capcom had already developed *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* and *Marvel Super Heroes* before introducing its own characters to the mix. Without the prior relationship or natural fit cast, Tatsunoko does stand out as an odd partnership – but thankfully, one that resulted in arguably the Wii's best fighter.

» [Wii] Frank West must be happy to be fighting something other than undead cannibals, we reckon.

THE CAPCOM RAZZIES

HERE ARE THE GAMES THAT JUST WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE REAL AWARDS...

STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

»1995

While it's not the worst fighting game out there, *Street Fighter: The Movie* looks woefully dated due to its use of digitised sprites of the film actors. Capcom is at its best when setting fighting game trends, and this was a case where it followed them to its own detriment.

MEGA MAN: THE POWER BATTLE

»1995

Taking *Mega Man* into the coin-op realm wasn't the worst idea, but the execution left a lot to be desired. This simple boss rush recycles enemies from the classic console games, and while it looks nice enough, we'd rather put our coins to use elsewhere and get the full experience at home.

FINAL FIGHT REVENGE

»1999

This would have been a perfectly acceptable 3D fighter in the mid-Nineties. Unfortunately, it hit arcades the same year as more impressive games like *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *Dead Or Alive 2*. Worse yet, the home version served as a mediocre end to Capcom's stellar support for the Sega Saturn.

CAPCOM FIGHTING JAM

»2004

This attempt to salvage the cancelled 3D game *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* was a real mess. With a weird character roster full of mismatched sprites, ugly backgrounds and a severe lack of balance, this is the closest thing to an officially sanctioned Mugen game Capcom has ever released.

» [Xbox 360] *Street Fighter IV* brought back lapsed fans by putting heavy focus on the old World Warriors.

» [Xbox 360] Did Crimson Viper seem more like a *King Of Fighters* design? Maybe, but she was plenty of fun.

» [Xbox 360] Hey, it's a moment of triumph for Dan – everyone's favourite pink-clad martial artist.

BEST COMEBACK AWARD

STREET FIGHTER IV

2008

The earliest years of the new millennium certainly weren't kind to Capcom's premier fighting series. After *Street Fighter EX3* received a middling reception on PS2, *Street Fighter* seemed to transition into a legacy brand – good for nostalgic releases like *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*, but not much else. Then came *Street Fighter IV*, which Capcom co-developed with the ex-SNK developers at Dimps. This game would bring back the *Street Fighter II* cast and add a handful of newcomers including French grappler Abel and the Mexican luchador El Fuerte, while the 2D gameplay included new mechanics such as the hit-absorbing Focus Attack and Ultra Combos that could facilitate improbable comebacks.

Absence had clearly made players' hearts grow fonder. The original arcade version of *Street Fighter IV* drew huge attention from hardcore fans, and home versions of the game sold in their millions, leading to a series of updates culminating with *Ultra Street Fighter IV* in 2014. But it wasn't just a comeback for the *Street Fighter* series – the fighting game scene as a whole benefitted from the renewed interest generated by Capcom's game, with major tournaments like the Evolution Championship Series seeing far greater attendance in the years following its release.

» [Dreamcast] Despite many years of waiting, we still believe that *Darkstalkers* hasn't yet taken a stake to the heart.

PLEASE REMAKE THIS AWARD

DARKSTALKERS CHRONICLE

2000

If you don't count crossovers – and for the sake of this argument, we don't – *Darkstalkers* is arguably second in Capcom's fighting pecking order behind *Street Fighter*. You just wouldn't know that based on how much attention Capcom pays the series, and the neglect baffles us. Succubus Morrigan Aensland is the face of the series and still appears in a variety of Capcom games, but with the modern popularity of Halloween and all things spooky, it seems criminal that we so rarely see any activity from a series filled with monsters. The *Darkstalkers* games allowed for experimentation that often carried over into the company's other fighting games, such as the introduction of air blocking and powered-up EX moves.

If you want to enjoy the ultimate *Darkstalkers* experience, track down the Japan-only Dreamcast release *Vampire Chronicle: For Matching Service*, or the PSP port that was brought to international audiences as *Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower*. This is a version of *Darkstalkers* 3 that not only lets you pick from every character in the series, as well as a specific game in the series for them to draw moves and properties from – a cool gimmick later employed in *Hyper Street Fighter II*.

MASTERFUL MECHANICS AWARD

CAPCOM VS SNK 2: MARK OF THE MILLENNIUM 2001

2001

Of all the fighting games that Capcom has produced, we reckon that when it comes to gameplay, the second of its clashes against cross-town rivals SNK is the undisputed champion. At the most basic level, you've got a fighting model refined over years and a massive roster of 48 characters. There's the return to six-button play after the original used just four, and the Ratio system from the first game has been revised – rather than each character having a fixed strength, the game allows you to split four points between up to three team members.

But that's not all – the Groove system has been expanded, with six options that offer mechanical approximations of various games from both companies. Depending on which you choose, you can have dodge rolls or parrying, dashing or running, air blocking or small jumps. You can choose to manually charge your Super Meter, you can choose custom combos, you can have the Rage Gauge from *Samurai Shodown*. It may be daunting for fighting newcomers, but that's not who *Capcom Vs SNK 2* is aimed at. This is a game for the hardcore fan, and it offers so much flexibility that you can come back to it for years.

» [Dreamcast] Seeing as he's using P-Groove, Guile could just parry Iori's projectile here.

THE STREET WRITER

CAPCOM BRAND MANAGER MATT EDWARDS REFLECTS ON SOME PERSONAL FAVOURITE FIGHTERS

Why do you think Capcom was able to offer such a diverse range of fighting games in the Nineties?
Even back in the Nineties, Capcom had multiple development teams working on a wide range of titles. That's as true today as it was back then. But the difference between then and now is how front-and-centre fighting games were. The most bonkers year for me is 1998. *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Plasma Sword: Nightmare Of Bilstein* and *Tech Romancer*. How Capcom was able to juggle this many projects simultaneously is a testament to the highly talented development staff they had under their roof during this rapidly evolving era of the gaming industry.

Capcom produced plenty of great one-offs and smaller series back then. What's your favourite among them?
Rival Schools had an interesting plot that centred on students from opposing schools and their investigation of attacks and kidnappings in their shared city. It was less of a thinly veiled excuse to explain why everyone is fighting and more an integral mystery to motivate you to play through multiple times with different characters. So much so, that when *Rival Schools* was ported to the PlayStation the following year, the development team fleshed out the story further with animated sequences and fully voiced cutscenes. *Rival Schools* holds a special place in my heart for this very reason.

Is there a game that you're hoping to see fresh appreciation for when *Capcom Fighting Collection 2* releases?
For me, it's *Capcom Vs SNK 2*. There's a whole generation of fighting game fans that cut their teeth on *Street Fighter IV*, *V* and *6*, but may not be familiar with this beloved crossover. If you don't know about *Samurai Shodown* and *Garou: Mark of the Wolves*, you'll discover that K-Groove mixes the systems of these two games together in an offensively explosive way. If you've never seen Dudley and Billy Kane chilling out as a red bus swings by on the London stage, you'll hear why *This Is True Love Makin'* is an all-time fan favourite theme. And if you're unfamiliar with the term 'SNK boss syndrome', you'll have one hell of a fight on your hands when you eventually face down Ultimate Rugal.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
AND ENJOY GREAT SAVINGS!

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE NOW AT
www.magazinesdirect.com/RET/DH44E
TELEPHONE 0330 333 1113 AND QUOTE DH44E

TERMS & CONDITIONS Offer closes **01st September 2025**. Price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, please allow up to 6 weeks for the delivery of your first subscription issue (up to 8 weeks overseas) the subscription rate includes postage and packaging.*Savings are based on the cover price. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period. **Access to the digital library will end with your subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries and overseas rates please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle. If you are an active subscriber, you have instant access to back issues through your iOS or Android devices. Your digital magazine entitlement is available at no additional cost and no further action is required. Pocketmags library may not have access to the full archive of digital back issues.
** Access to the digital library will end with your subscription.

Exclusive ***Subscriber Cover*** *Every Issue!*

Reasons to subscribe...

- **NEW!** Full digital access to 80+ back issues when you subscribe to print!**
- You'll never miss an issue!
- It's delivered direct to your door
- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

PRINT + DIGITAL ACCESS

£21.06
EVERY 6 MONTHS

SAVE **40%***

DIGITAL EDITION

£19.46
EVERY 6 MONTHS

To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit: **magazinesdirect.com** (click on 'Single issues' tab)
Or you can email: **help@magazinesdirect.com** For further help call: **+44(0)330 333 1113** Lines are open Mon-Fri 8.30am-7pm and Sat 10am-3pm UK time. Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.
Full subscription prices: £70.20 for UK, €155 for Europe, $176 for US, £135 for Rest of World.

THE MAKING OF MAGNETRON

DESPITE THE SUCCESS OF QUAZATRON, ITS AUTHOR, STEVE TURNER, MOVED ON TO OTHER IDEAS, KEEN TO PRODUCE ORIGINAL GAMES FOR THE SPECTRUM. WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES DICTATED A QUICK PROJECT, THE GRAFTGOLD PROGRAMMER RETURNED TO HIS BIGGEST HIT. IT DIDN'T QUITE GO TO PLAN...

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

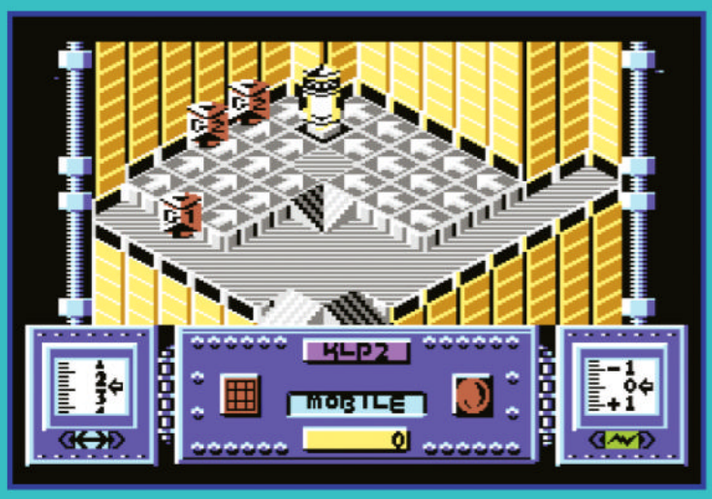
IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD (TELECOMSOFT)
- **DEVELOPER:** GRAFTGOLD (STEVE TURNER)
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

There's always been a dichotomy at the heart of videogame sequels. Publishers love them, an easy cash-in on the coattails of a successful forebear. Developers, however, generally view them otherwise – an unsatisfying mix of the earlier game plus an attempt to bring something different, but not too different, to the table when they'd much rather be working on a new and original concept. At least, that's how Steve Turner, the man behind both *Quazatron* and *Magnetron*, feels. "It's like with films," he muses. "Take *James Bond*, for instance. You always see the same little bits come round and round as if they've cut and pasted different movies."

Having completed the excellent magical adventure, *Ranarama*, for Graftgold's publisher, Hewson, Steve was thinking about his next project when reality hit home. "It was a time where every game's return was getting less and less," he grimaces. "I didn't want to drop the quality, but new games were now taking nine months to a year to do." Steve's solution was to take an existing idea and put a fresh angle on its display and gameplay. "I made a list of the things [from *Quazatron*] that I thought should be preserved, of which the main character was really the highlight." *Quazatron*'s star, the loveable tinpot KLP-2, with its novel feedback demonstrating its current health, would once more be the central character. "And then I thought about the 3D backdrop and retaining the crucial gameplay elements – but the main thing I decided to change was the scrolling, because I was never quite happy with that," Steve says.

Quazatron's scrolling – activated whenever KLP-2 'pushes' against the edge of a screen – was the sole dissenting element upon its release. "Graphically, my only nag is that the scrolling is too slow," noted one of *Crash*'s trio of reviewers in the magazine's Smash review. Like many Spectrum programmers, Steve would eliminate the issue by making his follow-up flick screen. "I tried to get a different look into it as well," he notes, "like the parallax stars at the top." A few more splashes of colour added to the aesthetic divergence while a new minigame replaced the frantic circuit blocking of *Quazatron* and its inspiration, Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid*. "*Ranarama* had this letter-swapping word minigame," says Steve. "And I thought that could work in two dimensions with being able to swap pieces over, kind of like those puzzles with plastic



» [C64] KLP-2 prepares to take on a trio of enemy robots.

» [C64] Steve Turner designed almost all the graphics for *Magnetron*, despite this credit screen.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

3D SPACE WARS
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM
RELEASED: 1983

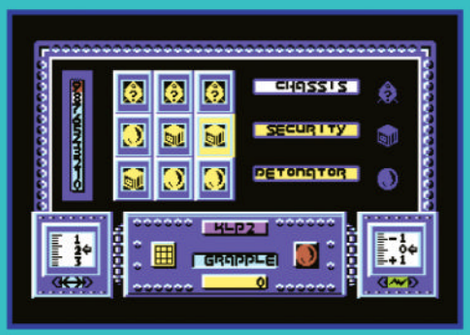
AVALON (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM
RELEASED: 1984

QUAZATRON
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM
RELEASED: 1986

» [C64] These narrow paths leave little scope for KLP-2 to dodge enemies.

» [C64] Each *Magnetron* scene is enclosed within one screen.

» [C64] Oh dear.



» [C64] The new grapple game brings a fresh dynamic to play.

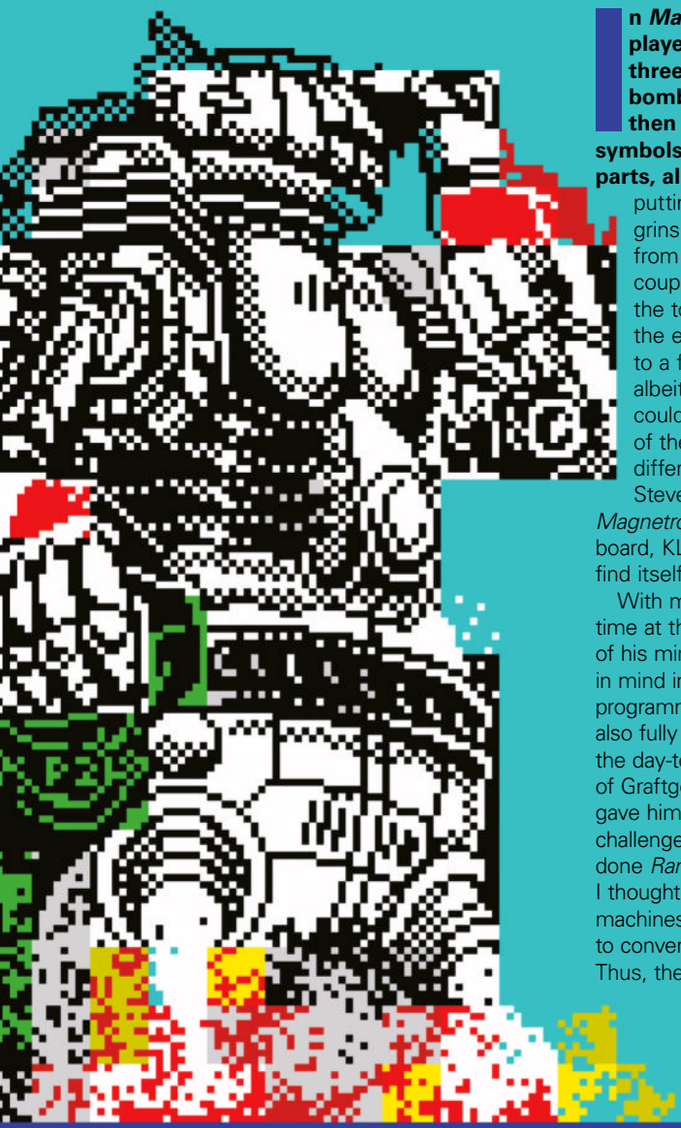
BRAYBROOK ON MAGNETRON

STEVE TURNER'S EXPERT COMMODORE COLLEAGUE, ANDREW BRAYBROOK, REVISITS MAGNETRON

"Steve and I were working in a two-desk office behind his garage – technically a posh shed! At this time, we could see what the other was doing so that there could be collaboration. Knowing that *Magnetron* needed to be done on two wildly different machines, there had to be some distillation to the lowest common denominator. Steve created a new game with new screen-sized maps, eliminating the *Quazatron* scroll-centring that some people grizzled about. We reused my reworked *Paradroid* font from *Quazatron*, and I might have also designed some of the panel graphics – I can't really remember!

"Steve finished the Spectrum version of *Magnetron* and rewrote it for the C64 double-quick. His usual method was to work through the whole lot, assemble it, and be a little disappointed that it didn't work the first time. *Magnetron*'s C64 attract sequence credits me with its graphics – I'm sure that's not right. Steve did all the game graphics, although I may have provided a few bits and pieces for the C64 game.

"I had always stuck to 2D games, keeping the maths simple and utilising the strengths of the C64. Steve used the CPU power of the Spectrum to create 3D environments for games before bringing it to the C64. It's doing some clever stuff in our Graftgold tradition of trying to push the envelope. What is 3D compared to 2D? Well, it's one louder, isn't it? A whole extra level of clever."



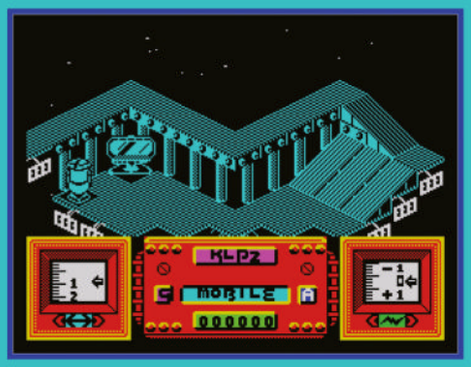
In *Magnetron*'s grappling sub-game, the player swaps symbols in a three-by-three grid, primarily aligning the three bombs to avoid the self-destruct before then working on sorting the other symbols that give KLP-2 access to its rival's parts, all within a strict time limit. "I liked putting the player under time pressure!" grins Steve. With the game's name derived from the idea of magnetic floor pieces coupled with continuity with its forebear, the tone of *Magnetron* also changed from the exploration and grappling of *Quazatron* to a faster, more action-orientated game, albeit with some deeper elements. "You could basically build a custom robot out of the bits, but I wanted the parts to have different weights and positives," explains Steve. A good example is negotiating *Magnetron*'s steep ramps. With heavy gear on board, KLP-2 needed a powerful engine, or it'd find itself sliding back down the slope.

With maximising his time at the forefront of his mind – bearing in mind in addition to programming, he was also fully involved in the day-to-day running of Graftgold – Steve gave himself another challenge. "From the outset, because we'd done *Ranarama* on the Spectrum and C64, I thought, let's design something for both machines. So I had in mind that I was going to convert *Magnetron* myself to the C64." Thus, the *Quazatron* sequel, based on a game originally released on the Commodore 64 and programmed by Steve Turner's colleague, Andrew Braybrook, would bring the winning formula back home. "Andrew was quite amazed how I converted it," remembers Steve. "He tended to get a game going a bit at a time; I sat down and just converted the whole thing to 6502. Then, when I'd got a clean compile, I'd start getting bits working on the machine. I prefer to do it that way because there's an economy in what you do."

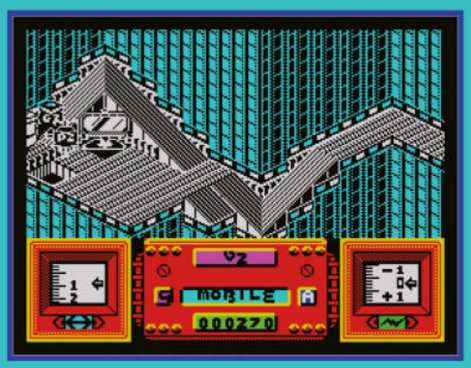
> "THE MAIN THING I DECIDED TO CHANGE WAS THE SCROLLING, BECAUSE I WAS NEVER QUITE HAPPY WITH THAT"
> STEVE TURNER

Nevertheless, the Spectrum version had a base that utilised *Quazatron*'s plotting system, robot movement, and interaction. The C64 game must have added more pressure to Steve's idea of a quick turnaround? "Well, there's a load of things that can be directly converted, like a call or jump instruction. They've all got an equivalent instruction in the other language." *Magnetron* also allowed Steve to stretch his musical talents, composing tunes on his guitar before converting them to ▶

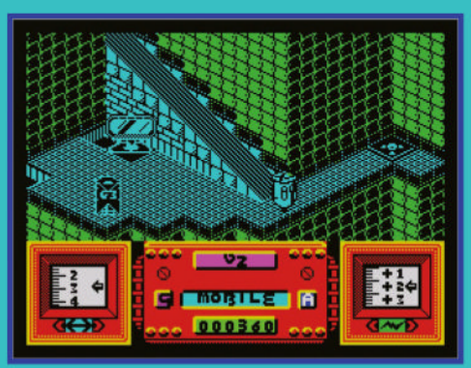
» [C64] The key that unlocks the game – reading the instructions.



» [ZX Spectrum] KLP-2's mission begins.



» [ZX Spectrum] KLP-2 is cornered – grapple or fight!



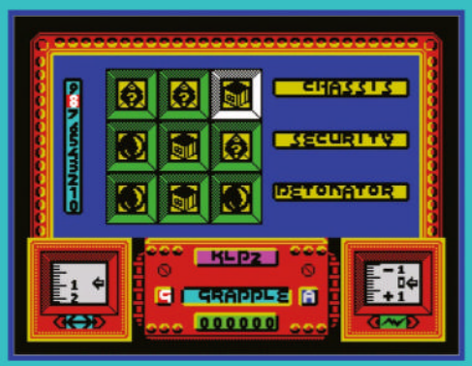
» [ZX Spectrum] Steve tried to include more colour in *Magnetron*.

> "I WANTED TO SPEED UP THE ACTION WITHOUT LOSING THE MAIN FEEL OF QUAZATRON"
> STEVE TURNER

the Spectrum, then the Commodore computer. "[The C64 conversion] probably took about two months, but then I got distracted with all the business with Hewson and almost lost heart with it," says Steve. Ah – we've arrived at the difficult part of *Magnetron*'s history, a cautionary tale that encapsulates the chaotic nature of the 8-bit market as the Eighties drew to a close.

From 1983, Graftgold (or ST Software as it was known then) had a close relationship with Hewson, Steve and Andrew producing many of its best-selling games. When a young programmer named Dominic Robinson sent Hewson a short demo of *Uridium* on the ZX Spectrum, it incited further collaboration between the publisher and Graftgold. "We'd become quite friendly with Dominic and John [Cumming], and they gave us warnings that things weren't quite right [at Hewson]," recalls Steve. "Andrew had been up to Hewson to talk to them about *Morpheus*, and he'd sensed something was off, too." Then, a fateful call from Debbie Sillitoe, Hewson's second-in-command. "We were already nervous; then Debbie called to say she'd left, telling us they wouldn't survive, and would we like to come to London to talk to the people at another software house, Telecomsoft. So, of course, we said yes; the least we could do is listen to what they had to say."

By 1987, Graftgold was itching to work on the new 16-bit machines, the future of the games market, with Andrew Braybrook particularly keen on the Commodore Amiga. Telecomsoft, eager for development teams to sponsor, was willing to invest in Graftgold to facilitate 16-bit development. "As an aside, they asked what we were working on at the moment," says Steve. "So we showed them *Morpheus* and *Magnetron*. We weren't keen, but they consulted lawyers who said it should be OK because we hadn't had any advances or a specific contract over those games." Graftgold's two games, both almost finished, found themselves ready to be published under Telecomsoft's Firebird label. With developers living hand to mouth – one unreleased game could end a company – it was an arrangement Steve couldn't afford to turn down. Telecomsoft made good on its promise, financing Graftgold and enabling it to expand its staff and offices.



» [ZX Spectrum] Grappling, Spectrum-style!

PHOENIX FROM THE FLAMES

RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT MORE GAMES FROM THE GRAFTGOLD-TELECOMSOFT RELATIONSHIP

FLYING SHARK

ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC •1987

■ When another developer let it down, Graftgold stepped in to help Firebird with the Z80 versions of this Taito arcade game. The coder/artist team of Dominic Robinson and John Cumming duly produced a superb shmup, with Steve Turner porting it to the Amstrad CPC in just two weeks.

MORPHEUS

C64 •1987

■ Published by fellow Telecomsoft label Rainbird, *Morpheus* was Andrew Braybrook's next highly anticipated shmup, its development story told by the programmer himself in his second *Zzap!64* diary. With its hugely impressive display and player spacecraft, it's another technically adept creation.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

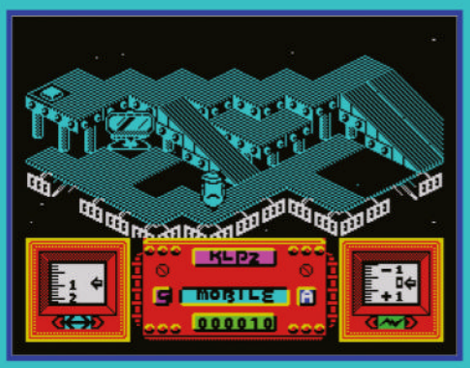
ZX SPECTRUM, C64 • 1988

■ Designed by John Cumming, this fantasy adventure was hamstrung with a rather bizarre advertising campaign featuring a laconic Humphrey Bogart. It's a decent *Ghosts 'N Goblins*-style game for the C64, with Graftgold's David O'Connor producing a diverse port for the ZX Spectrum.

» [ZX Spectrum] As in *Magnetron*'s original inspiration, *Paradroid*, the player can bring up data on opposing droids.

Then, in the winter of 1987, Hewson survived with investment from third parties. Upset that its premier developer had jumped ship – and taken its impending games with it – legal discussions began, preventing the games' publication in time for the lucrative Christmas market. "The first proceedings were to decide if the games should be released or not," remembers Steve. "The judge ruled that as there was money to be made out of the games, and it didn't favour anybody if they weren't released, that they should be, and that Telecomsoft were in the best position to do this." Further wrangling over the proceeds of the eventual sales ensued, delaying *Magnetron*'s release until the spring of 1988. Comments Steve, "That was disappointing because it was all about the Christmas market. That's why the big shows were in September, it was all geared up for that time." According to the book *Memories Of Firebird*, Firebird's Paula Byrne and Hewson settled the dispute over a curry.

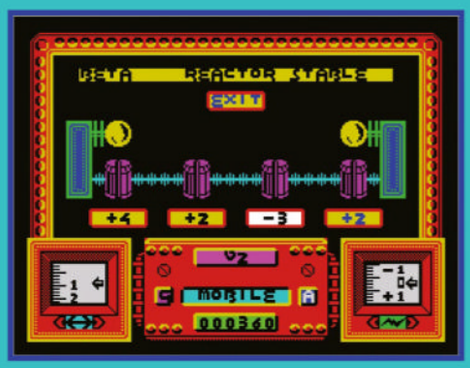
The critical reception for *Magnetron* varied across both formats – Steve didn't consider an Amstrad version worth the effort – with EMAP's *Sinclair User* particularly fond of



» [ZX Spectrum] As you can tell from the expression on KLP-2's face, he's not a happy 'bot.

Graftgold's latest. The magazine's reviewer, Chris Jenkins, said, "The gameplay of the main section is more exciting than most programmers could come up with, but both the addition of the sub-games and the complexities of the strategy necessary to complete all the levels make it even zippier." Elsewhere, some reviewers were tiring of the format, especially *Crash* and *Zzap!64*, with the latter magazine not fond of the game's ZX Spectrum origins. Remembers Steve, "I was quite pleased with the design as a whole, but I would have liked to have pushed the C64 version a little more. I got it working and was going to add some whistles and bells, but in the end, I'm not sure the time would have been worth it. The 8-bit market was taking a dive – the quality of budget games matched the more expensive games, and there weren't any new techniques on the machines to push our top-priced games any further."

Would *Magnetron* have sold better had it been released in time for Christmas 1987?



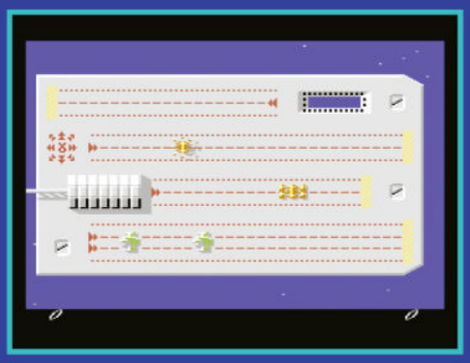
» [ZX Spectrum] KLP-2's mission is to stabilise the four reactors on each of the eight satellites.

It's really hard to tell, given that by then, full-price original games were already struggling, overawed by budget titles and coin-op conversions. "I wanted to speed up the action without losing the main feel of *Quazatron*," notes Steve. "I think *Morpheus* did better than *Magnetron*, but in all honesty, none of our Telecomsoft games sold that well." Nevertheless, the two games mark a turning point for Graftgold as it expanded its roster of programmers, artists and sound engineers, ready for its move into the world of 16-bit. ✱

For more information on *Magnetron* and all of Graftgold's games, check out *The Graftgold Story*, available from Fusion Retro Books: fusionretrobooks.com

You can also read about the history of Firebird in Richard Hewison's *Memories Of Firebird*, available from Telos Publishing: Telos.co.uk/shop

Our thanks (again!) to Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook for their time.



INTENSITY

C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1988

■ An unusual game from Andrew Braybrook in that it contains no shooting. In *Intensity*, the player is on a rescue mission, piloting a ground skimmer and collecting colonists with its onboard drone. Original and somewhat frenzied, *Intensity* is an acquired taste and one of Andrew's more underrated games.

BUSHIDO

C64 • 1989

■ Steve Turner's only ground-up C64 game is a technical marvel featuring impressive graphics, animation and gameplay. Sadly, it was just too late in the Commodore 8-bit computer's life, despite the usual high level of detail from Graftgold and an interesting merging of several game genres.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

C64, VARIOUS • NEVER

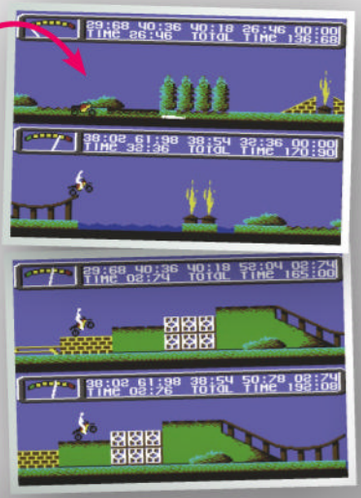
■ Having enjoyed great success with *Bubble Bobble*, Firebird seemed set to release its sequel, this time alongside developer Graftgold. However, these were troubling times at Telecomsoft. When Microprose UK bought the company in 1989, *Rainbow Islands*, almost complete, was shelved.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

BUDGET GAMES

Pocket money didn't go too far when you were a kid, so budget releases became a great way of purchasing games while you waited for your birthday and Christmas. So here are ten low-cost offerings that were worth breaking open your piggy bank for

KIKSTART 2



■ There were plenty of reasons to grab this excellent sequel on release. It has greatly improved visuals compared to the original game, while Mr Chip Software also tweaked how the bikes handle. Best of all though is the inclusion of a course editor that lets you punish friends with your own fiendish track designs, making this Mastertronic published sequel fantastic value for money.

BMX SIMULATOR

■ After making several games for Mastertronic, Richard and David Darling formed Codemasters and *BMX Simulator* became their impressive calling card. It's a genuinely great debut, kicking off the *Simulator* brand that the publisher became famous for and highlighting the technical prowess of Richard. Granted, it's just Atari's *Super Sprint* with BMX bikes, but who cares when the action is this slick and frantic?

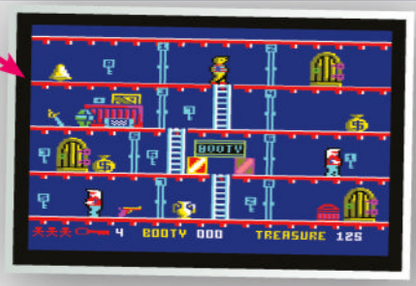
JOE BLADE

■ One of the best series to come out of the Players budget range was *Joe Blade* and it's still an enjoyable romp today. While several versions share the same monochrome visuals, the graphics are detailed and cartoon-like, providing plenty of character as Joe stomps around and tries to escape. It does get rather repetitive, but you'll still have a good time with it.

FEUD

■ This entertaining offering from the Pickford brothers sees two rival wizards fighting for supremacy in a battle to the death. Debuting on Mastertronic's new Bulldog Software label, you must traverse the maze-like countryside seeking out the herbs that will fuel your spells so you can put your brother in the ground. Just avoid the C64 version as it's a poor representation of Jon's original vision (see **RG**132 for more info).

BOOTY



The debut game of Telecomsoft's budget label Firebird is a cracking platformer that was originally planned for a higher price point (**RG**261 has more info). While all the home versions of *Booty* are good fun, the Spectrum original is the most polished and presents the best challenge. As with many budget publishers, Firebird's quality would vary from release to release, but *Booty* proved it certainly meant business.

KANE

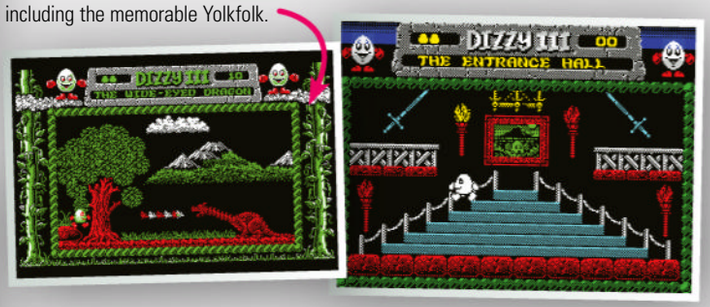
We're a sucker for anything cowboy related, so *Kane* and its sequel were instant purchases for us back in the day. Both games are essentially a collection of Wild West-themed minigames, with the first including shooting down birds with a bow, riding your horse across the treacherous landscape and surviving a town shoot-out. *Kane* isn't the greatest-looking game, but it is plenty of fun.

SPELLBOUND

The *Magic Knight* series turns 40 this year, so allow us to remind you of this excellent sequel. Acclaimed on release for its Windimation system, *Spellbound* took the series in a fresh new direction and saw the game's protagonist attempting to rescue Gimbal The Wizard. Some of the puzzles were certainly tough and it was a quid more expensive at £2.99, but the quality was certainly there.

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

Few budget-game protagonists were as famous as Dizzy. When the Oliver twins whisked up their idea, little could they have known that the heroic egg would appear in countless adventures and spin-off games. *Fantasy World Dizzy* is not only one of Dizzy's best adventures, but introduced many of the features that would appear in the series, including the memorable Yolkfolk.

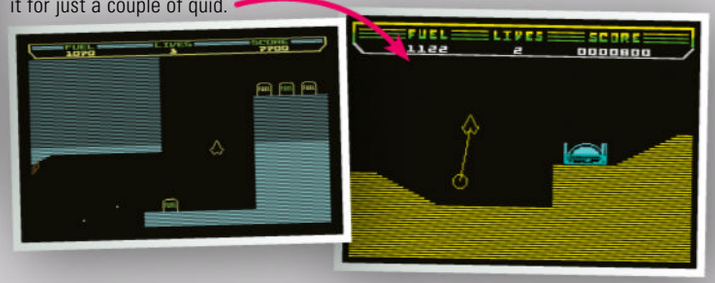


NINJA SCOOTER SIMULATOR

This bizarre budget release combines the Ninja Scooter craze of the Eighties with Namco's *Metro-Cross*. The end result is a genuinely entertaining action game that doesn't offer much variety, but does present a solid challenge as you race to the end of each stage. We used to love playing this on the Amstrad CPC 464, although the C64 version was absolutely trashed on release. Shame.

THRUST

This remarkable offering from the late Jeremy C Smith is a rather interesting release as the BBC Micro edition was a full-price release that arrived several weeks after the C64 budget release. We're not sure why Telecomsoft felt it was worthy of its budget label, but we're grateful that we got to spend hundreds of hours playing it for just a couple of quid.



ULTIMATE GUIDE

HANG-ON

FORTY YEARS AGO, YU SUZUKI CHANGED THE ARCADE LANDSCAPE WITH HIS MOTORCYCLE RACING GAME HANG-ON, THE FIRST OF SEGA'S 'PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE' MACHINES. JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE ITS ANNIVERSARY BY LEATHERING UP AND GOING FOR A QUICK BLAST AROUND THE TRACK

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

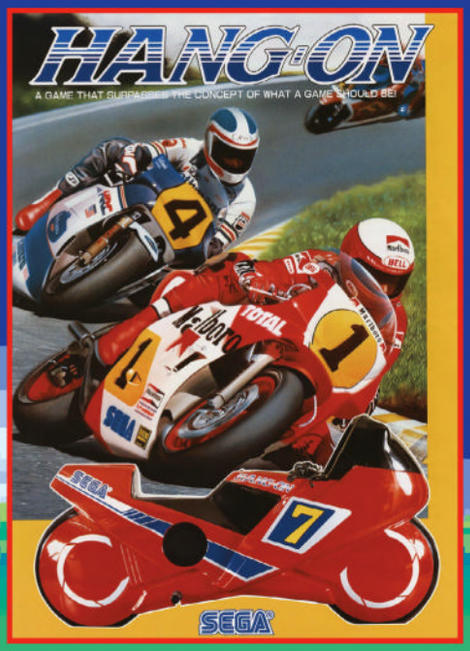
» [Arcade] The iconic start line screen. Your destination: that vanishing point on the horizon.

» [Arcade] You should always stick to the racing line. The problem is, that's what your rivals are doing.

If you want to witness Yu Suzuki's arcade ambitions when he joined Sega as a 24-year-old, you only have to look at the difference between his first two coin-ops. His debut, *Champion Boxing*, was a direct port of his SG-1000 home-console game, and he achieved this by simply sticking an actual SG-1000 inside an arcade cab. For his second, *Hang-On*, he planned to stick an actual *50cc motorbike engine* inside a bike-shaped cab – to emulate the sounds, vibrations and presumably smells of riding a real 500cc performance bike. Can you imagine? He also wanted to include mechanics that would lift the nose of the bike as you accelerated, and an onboard fan to simulate the feel of wind in your face.

Suzuki's vision was ultimately compromised on the grounds of cost and practicality, but the ride-on version of *Hang-On* remained a showstopper when it arrived in arcades in July 1985. Players straddled the stylised red bike and manoeuvred it using their body weight, leaning left and right to take the corners. It also featured a realistic handlebar complete with brake lever and twist throttle, and there were even switches inside the footpegs that increased your grip on the road when pressed. The planned engine was substituted for two large stereo speakers in the centre

"THE SENSE OF SPEED WAS AMAZING; THE GAME'S NAME WAS TRULY APT"



Hang-On was inspired by designer Yu Suzuki's love for all things two-wheeled.

of the bike that outputted low/medium frequencies, rumbling away as you played. There were two additional speakers located upfront, beneath the handlebars. The game itself was displayed on an 18-inch monitor, integrated into the bike's body where the windshield would be.

Looking at the ride-on type, with its strong simulator leanings, it's no surprise to hear that Suzuki was more interested in riding bikes on roads than in videogames. But that didn't mean the gameplay was an afterthought. Suzuki wanted to marry his innovative cab design with an equally unique 3D racing game and challenged Sega's engineers to develop the necessary hardware. The answer was a custom system that utilised twin 68000 CPUs and a separate video board – the famous Super Scaler – that offered hardware sprite-scaling. The result was a velvet-smooth, lightning-fast racer where trackside objects whizzed by like you really were barrelling along at 278kph, leaning into corners, *hanging on* for dear life. The sense of speed was amazing; the game's name was truly apt.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS WENT THE DISTANCE?

MASTER SYSTEM

■ As console pack-ins go, this is one of the best, delivering a decent version of the coin-op. The track effect and sense of speed are admirable, with the only negative being the lack of music – token jingles on the title screen and when you complete a course are not enough.

SG-1000

■ Titled *Hang-On II*, this was presented as a follow-up to the earlier Master System release, which is odd because it's a shadow of that version. Your bike moves left and right, rather than the viewpoint, and visually it's a little rough. On the plus side it does feature in-game music.

MSX

■ This ROM cartridge release is almost a carbon copy of the SG-1000 version, only it's slower and choppier. It's also weirdly easy – you can complete the first five-stage course without even using top gear! Unlike most MSX capers, at least it's not a nasty Spectrum port.

PC-88

■ Skidding in from left field is this conversion for the Japanese home-computer range. It mostly resembles the Master System version, but it's a step too far for the ageing micro. Its default speed setting is pedestrian and the music sounds like the speaker has been dropped in a fish tank.

[Arcade] A high-speed shunt will send you and the other guy into a spin.

EXTENDED PLAY

LOOKING BACK AT THE HANG-ON SEQUELS

HANG-ON JR

Released in arcades six months after the original, this pared-back version was designed for Sega's cheapo System E hardware. It adds twice the number of stages, water hazards, and an animated ending, but it's basically a straight-to-video sequel to the original blockbuster.

SUPER HANG-ON

Never has the 'Super' prefix been so appropriate. This wonderful 1987 expansion includes more stages, undulating tracks, and a turbo button that boosts your bike like Street Hawk. And like *Out Run* (with which it shares its hardware), there are a choice of music tracks.

LIMITED EDITION HANG-ON

Released in 1991, this is basically a version of *Super Hang-On* transposed from the mini ride-on model to the full-size *Hang-On* bike. The only real differences are the bike is now coloured blue, and the game gives you extra time.

HANG-ON GP

The most recent game to carry the *Hang-On* name was released for the Sega Saturn in 1995. Developed by Genki, it swaps out 2D sprites for 3D polygons, and stages for circuits, so it's *Hang-On* in name only. Saturn owners looking for a bike racer were better off with *Manx TT*.

[Arcade] Unlike *Out Run*, the stages don't meld together. One second you're by the seaside, the next you're in the desert.

[Arcade] For realism, the trackside signs were based on real brands. Interesting fact: JPS are **RG** writer Paul Drury's cigarette brand of choice.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the novelty of the big red bike overshadowed the actual game in magazine reviews. This review from UK multiformat monthly *Computer Gamer* was typical. "This new game from Sega is one of the best arcade games ever. The big feature comes in the control method – you have to sit on the bike and control it by leaning." The review, published in August 1985, went on to share some fascinating details about its US impact. "Its success was so great in America that the coin-op mechanism had to be modified to take coins of a higher value. It looks like being the first UK game to be fitted out for £1 coins." That's right – the game was 50p a spin, when in the UK most coin-ops were still 20p a play. *CVG* magazine believed it was worth the outlay. "Fifty pence may seem expensive but with practice you'll be able to stretch it for miles. *Hang-On* combines the superb graphics of a *Pole Position*-style race with the physical act of riding a bike. Best of all – you don't even need a driving licence!"

The ride-on units themselves cost £5,200 to buy, but press reports suggested that the machine could take up to £200 a day. We did the math: the game would pay for itself in about a month. For operators who didn't have the funds – or floor space – for the ride-on version, Sega also produced an upright type. This model lost the bike, retaining only the handlebars which pivoted left and right. On the plus side, the standard cab style allowed for a larger 20-inch monitor. A premium sit-down model was also available, which was essentially a slightly larger version of the upright with a static stool to sit on. Because of the more precise control method, an entirely new course layout was designed for the upright type. It featured more variation in the bends, including lots of long sweeping corners which were harder to negotiate on the bike. The effect of hitting rival bikers was also exaggerated, and overall the upright version was more challenging.

However, without the bike, the game's limitations were revealed. Yes, it was super fast, but there was only a single five-stage course and a practised player could reach the finish line in five minutes flat. The courses were completely flat too. Suzuki would address these perceived shortcomings in 1986, with the dirt-bike game *Enduro Racer*, which added rolling tracks and jumps, and *Out Run*, which, well, you know. He would return to

"THE NOVELTY OF THE BIG RED BIKE OVERSHADOWED THE ACTUAL GAME IN MAGAZINE REVIEWS"

COLLECTOR Q&A

LUC V OWNS A HANG-ON RIDE-ON MODEL, WHICH IS CURRENTLY IDLING AWAY IN HIS BASEMENT

What are your memories of *Hang-On*, and why did you want to add it to your arcade collection?
It all started when I was around ten years old. I was living in Montreal and my friends and I all had the Master System which came with *Hang-On*. One summer, my family went on vacation in New Jersey and on the boardwalk there were arcades full of machines, including *Hang-On*, *Out Run* and *Space Harrier*. I really liked Sega games and fell in love with the *Out Run* deluxe machine. I started collecting arcade machines in my mid-30s and I was always on the lookout for those rare deluxe Sega machines.

How did you come to own your *Hang-On* ride-on model?
Arcade machines are few and far between here in Canada so I often look for them on Facebook Marketplace in the northeastern United States. In May 2022 I saw an ad for *Hang-On* and sent a message to the seller who was located in Maine – a six-hour drive away. I asked for videos to see if it was worth doing a restoration. I could see some issues, but for a few hundred US dollars, I decided I was going to take on the project.

Did you have any trouble collecting such a big machine?
Me and my arcade hunting buddy, my father Michel, rented a trailer and left early in the morning for a road trip. The machine was located in a small barn and was the perfect height for the trailer. We came back home at 4am and dumped it in my garage.

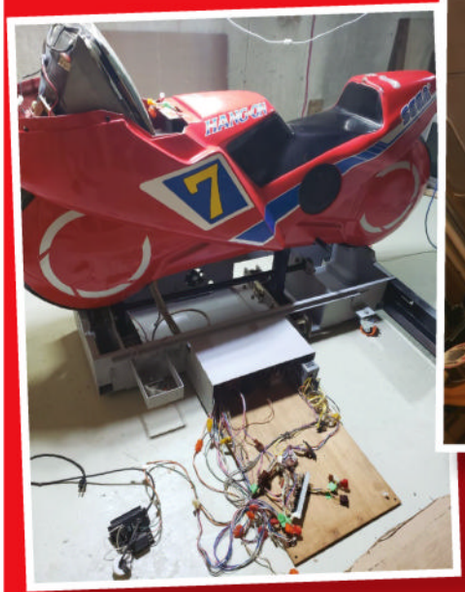
Can you tell us what sort of condition the machine was in?
The bike and the base structure were in good condition, but the game PCB, sound PCB and monitor required several hours of repair. The machine had housed several families of mice, probably the Biker Mice From Mars. It was very dirty and I had to dismantle everything into pieces to clean thoroughly.

How did you approach the restoration work of the machine?
I started by fixing the monitor and then the game PCB. I had to change several chips, including some custom repro ones which were very expensive. Then I started the restoration of the heavy mechanics and the mechanism that inclines the motorcycle. I adjusted the analogue potentiometers – accelerator, brakes, left and right pivot – and reassembled the cluster. Finally, I painted the frame. I couldn't find any reproduction stickers on the internet – all specialists only hold artwork for *Super Hang-On*. However, I like the bike with its scars, wear and some discolouration.

"THE MACHINE HAD HOUSED SEVERAL FAMILIES OF MICE..."

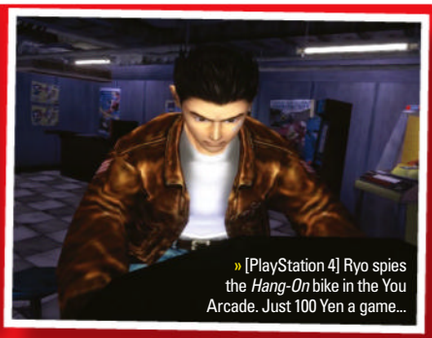
What was behind your decision to install SmartyPi in your *Hang-On*?
SmartyPi offers multiple motorcycle games, including *Limited Edition Hang-On* which I absolutely wanted. I added a real motorcycle push button to the handlebars to trigger the turbo.

Do you have any other Sega machines in your collection?
I do own an *Out Run* upright, but would prefer the deluxe version for sure. *Space Harrier* is also a grail I would jump on if the price was right. Sometimes I do wonder if my *Hang-On* should be in a real arcade or museum, and shared with other Sega arcade fanatics and younger kids that never had a chance to ride this machine.



» Luc's arcade at home. It's almost like we've stepped into the You Arcade in *Shenmue*.

» The game's PCBs, receiving some much needed care and attention on Luc's workbench.



» [PlayStation 4] Ryo spies the *Hang-On* bike in the You Arcade. Just 100 Yen a game...

HANG ON, IS THAT HANG-ON?

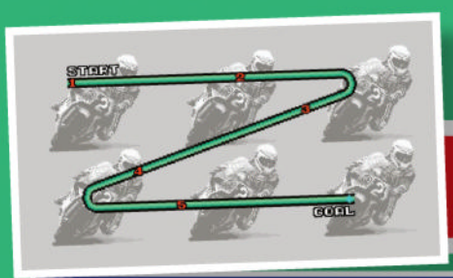
EXPLORING THE GAME'S CAMEO APPEARANCE IN SHENMUE

Shenmue was set in 1986, which afforded its creator Yu Suzuki the opportunity to include his early arcade hits in the game's 'living' world. Protagonist Ryo Hazuki discovers *Hang-On* and *Space Harrier* inside the You Arcade in Yokosuka, and both games are playable, providing an entertaining way to pass the time. Additionally, you are rewarded if you meet certain conditions: score more than 10 million points to win a mini *Hang-On* prize, and clear the game with a single credit to receive a certificate. The game also appears in *Shenmue II*, located inside the Yellow Head Building (Room 222), in Kowloon. *Space Harrier* returns in the sequel too, along with two other Suzuki classics: *Out Run* and *After Burner*.

Interestingly, for a game heavy on detail, the appearance of *Hang-On* was flubbed in the original Dreamcast releases. Despite it clearly being the ride-on model that Ryo plays, the track layout was from the upright version. This was either an oversight, or perhaps deliberate as the upright layout was more suited to standard controllers. Either way, it was corrected for the Xbox version of *Shenmue II*, and also in the *Shenmue I & II* collection released for modern systems in 2018.

"THE RIDE-ON UNITS COST £5,200, BUT REPORTS SUGGESTED THAT THE MACHINE COULD TAKE UP TO £200 A DAY"

» [Arcade] Easter egg: purposely hit the trackside 'G' on Stage 4 and you'll earn a 20-second time bonus.



TRACK MASTER

STAGE 1: ALPS

The opener provides a gentle introduction to proceedings, giving you the opportunity to weigh up the bike and how it handles. It's a mix of easy corners and long straights, with only one lively chicane near to the end of the stage that might pose a problem.

STAGE 2: SEASIDE

The difficulty steps up here. There aren't too many corners, but they are shorter and sharper so you need to be careful. In particular, there are two chicanes, and on the first one you'll need to ease off slightly, even if you follow the perfect racing line.

STAGE 3: GRAND CANYON

The challenge continues to steepen, with the appearance of the first extended chicane which requires you to throw the bike left, right, left in quick succession. Note also the increase in trackside objects. Ease off if it looks like you're about to slam a cactus.

the world of performance bikes in 1987 with *Super Hang-On*, a sequel-slash-update that featured four separate courses and a total of 48 stages. The upgraded version ran on the improved *Out Run* hardware, so it was even faster – a turbo button was added to unlock the bike's top speed of 324kph. *Super Hang-On* was issued as a smaller mini ride-on model that commanded less gravitas, but Sega did reprogram the game to work on the older *Hang-On* hardware and issued it as a conversion kit for the ride-on bike. This was superseded in 1991 by *Limited Edition Hang-On*, a factory-produced version of *Super Hang-On* housed inside a blue-coloured *Hang-On* ride-on machine.

As the more complete game, *Super Hang-On* was converted to many more home systems than the original. *Hang-On* was developed for the Master System, where it was bundled with the console in most regions, and versions for the SG-1000, MSX and PC-88 followed. All of the home versions added additional courses and manual gears. Years later an arcade-perfect version was later included in the first two *Shenmue* games, along with *Space Harrier*, *Out Run* and *After Burner*. These four games, plus *Power Drift*, were later included in the Japanese-only Dreamcast collection *Yu Suzuki's Game Works*, released in 2001.

Since then, the original has been overlooked in favour of *Super Hang-On*, which has appeared as a downloadable title on Wii, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and 3DS. For the Wii version, Sega producer Yosuke Okunari has shed light on the decision, revealing that developer M2 initially started to port *Hang-On*, but it "wasn't really clicking". Speaking to Sega's own blog in 2013, he said, "Since *Hang-On*'s horizon line doesn't move up and down, it's actually rather a plain game as-is. I thought that maybe if we released it in combination with *Super Hang-On*, we could add some historical context to create something I could get Sega interested in. In the end we weren't able to push *Hang-On* through the company. We did however get approval to move forward with *Super Hang-On* and we released it on Virtual Console."

It seems unlikely then that Sega will dust down *Hang-On* in the foreseeable future. But that doesn't really matter, as the game's place in arcade history is secure. When we remember those Sega 'physical experience' classics like *Space Harrier*, *Out Run*, *Galaxy Force* and *R360*, we acknowledge that the original *Hang-On* set them all in motion. ✱

» *Limited Edition Hang-On* was a rare sight in arcades. See **RG**77 for an interview with arcade collector Chris Bodicoat, who's lucky enough to own one.

A RUN-DOWN OF THE GAME'S FIVE STAGES ON THE RIDE-ON MODEL

STAGE 4: CITY NIGHT

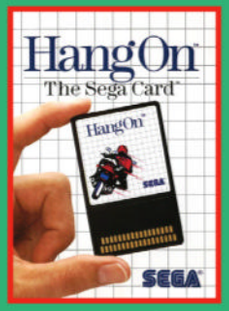
Say hello to long sweeping corners which require you to wobble the bike until you find the perfect angle. It's a skill. Once past them, the track snakes its way to the checkpoint. Look out for the HANG ON letters on the left side of the track – hit the G for a time boost.

STAGE 5: CIRCUIT

The final stage doesn't let up for a second, throwing long corners and double chicanes at you. Crucially, several corners have a sharp sting in their tale, forcing you to slow down as you exit them. Negotiate them and you should reach the goal with seconds to spare.

» [Master System] It was far from arcade perfect, but the Master System version gave the console a lot of credence.

» The confusingly-titled *Hang-On II* for Sega's SG-1000 console is a simplified port of the Master System conversion.



» The popular Master System version of *Hang-On* was originally issued on the nifty Sega Card format.

Out Run

LOOKS AREN'T EVERYTHING

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1987 » SEGA R&D 2

I'm not sure why, but Sega's Master System has something of a bad reputation when it comes to arcade conversions. Granted, there's certainly some duffers on the machine and even Sega struggled converting some of its more ambitious games, but there are plenty which are still great fun to play.

Bubble Bobble, *Rainbow Islands*, *Operation Wolf*, *The NewZealand Story*, *R-Type*, *Paperboy* and *Gauntlet* are some of the best 8-bit conversions around and they still hold up very well today. Sega's in-house adaptation of *Out Run* is another game that's still worth playing through now, and while it can't hope to capture the sheer thrill of the arcade original, the Japanese developer nevertheless did a great job of translating Yu Suzuki's stylish driving game to its 8-but console.

There are limitations though, most notably when it comes to the game's iconic music. They're certainly all recognisable, but they lack punch. Visually the game is a notable downgrade as well, there's a lot of roadside objects on-screen most of the time, but you'll rarely see much traffic and there's also a lot of flicker, which can be quite distracting. And yet somehow, it works, and that's largely down to how *Out Run* plays.

Everything feels like the arcade original did and it's surprisingly satisfying cruising past opponents. Admittedly, the Master System's lack of buttons means you need to press up and down to switch gears and everything has been downsized quite a bit, but it still feels like Sega's game. It even manages to include the huge, imposing stone archways from *Out Run*'s second stage, although the handling in these sections changes dramatically, with your car sliding left and right whenever they appear, which initially takes quite a while getting used to.

Despite all that, I actually prefer this version to the Mega Drive conversion, dinky sprites and all. I've a lot of fond memories playing this on my Mega Drive via that console's Power Base Converter and I ended up selling my actual Mega Drive version, because I simply didn't play it as much. Was I mad? Possibly, but sometimes better music and graphics don't necessarily mean a game will be better to play as well. ✱

MAGAZINE CRAFT

WIL OVERTON

The iconic videogame illustrations of Wil Overton are synonymous with two of the most popular Nintendo mags to ever hit newsstands – and there can be no doubt that they contributed to their success. We chat to Wil about creating covers, dabbling in games journalism and being in a long-term relationship with Joanna Dark

Words by Stuart Hunt

THEN

After helping to transform *Anime UK* from a newsletter to a magazine, Wil got the opportunity to combine his love of Japanese animation, videogames and Nintendo working as an illustrator and designer on *Super Play* and *N64 Magazine* at Future. He then left magazines to join Rare as a concept artist

NOW

After leaving Rare in 2011, Wil worked as an artist and illustrator for several game studios. He has since returned to Rare as a UI artist and recently worked on *Sea Of Thieves*. Thankfully, Wil still enjoys creating magazine covers and has drawn a number for us and others over the years.

» Wil has also illustrated awesome covers for this very mag – issue 20 and, most recently, issue 257.

What is the first videogame you remember playing, Wil?
I'm quite old, so I remember playing a lot of the electromechanical games in the arcades when I went on holidays. I was there when it switched over to digital games, with stuff like *Boot Hill* – which was probably one of the very first games I played. I remember there was a little snooker club in the town I grew up in, in Essex. They had a rotating roster with the likes of *Space Invaders*, *Defender*, *Joust*, *Mr Do!* and *Missile Command*. All the ones you know from those early days.

What computers and consoles did you own growing up?
By that time, the early Eighties, I had left school. My mate and I both had an Atari VCS; I was the first to get a micro with the ZX81. I've always liked gaming, ever since it started coming from the arcade and appearing in the home. I went from a ZX81 to a ZX Spectrum. I then had a Commodore 64 and jumped to the Amiga. Then the Japanese thing happened, and I was in a world of ridiculously expensive import carts for my Super Famicom, and then my Mega Drive much later.

When was your first job in graphic design?
That was in 1985. I attended a local college and did a graphic design course because I loved drawing. When I left college, I thought I wasn't good enough to be an illustrator, so I pursued graphic design and got a job working for this guy in London who ran a little one-man design studio. He was looking for a junior designer. I was doing paste-ups for adverts, magazines and local newspapers, stuff like that.

When did your interest in Japanese animation start?
I would say it was between 1985 and 1990. I found people who were getting third-generation duplicate VHSes of obscure Japanese cartoons. They weren't even subtitled. We'd watch them without a clue what was going on, but I loved the art style. It wasn't like the cartoons that I watched when I was a kid; it was like cartoons on steroids. They were well drawn and a lot more detailed.

Didn't your passion for anime lead you to producing a fanzine on the topic?
I found myself with some friends in London and part of a little fan group for Japanese animation. They were producing a fanzine, which was typed out, cut out and pasted up on a kitchen table. I asked if I could get involved and help to make it a bit slicker – because I had access to typesetting and all this other equipment from my job. One day, my boss saw me working on it and asked what it was. I told him, and he said, "Do you want to create a magazine? We can try to sell it." That's how *Anime UK* was formed.

Can you tell us about the team that worked with you on *Anime UK*?
We had a fantastic illustrator, a guy called Steve Kyte, who had done a lot of *Thunderbirds* stuff for Fleetway comics. He was doing all the illustration, I was doing the design, and Helen McCarthy, who later wrote anime stuff in *Super Play*, she was the editor – the brain of it all. I did all the layout and a little bit of illustration here and there. We hawked it around places like Forbidden Planet and various other comic shops in London and it sort of took off a little bit. Eventually we even got it into WHSmith.

How did you start drawing the distinctive covers for *Super Play*?

» The original artwork that Wil created for the *Super Play* mock-up – and used for the cover of the first issue.

> "When I left college, I thought I wasn't good enough to be an illustrator, so I pursued graphic design"
> WIL OVERTON

My FAVOURITE GAMING MAG

I have bought them all over the years, certainly in those Eighties years. *Zzap!64*, *Crash*, *Personal Computer Games*, right through to *CVG* when it had listings and *The One*, and *ACE*. If I had to pick favourites, it would have to be *Crash* and *Zzap!64*, because I had both machines. I liked them both equally and Oli Frey's art played a big part of their appeal because it defined the look of those magazines. My favourites are Oli's *Red Moon* and *Indiana Jones* covers.

Matt Bielby, who was working as an editor at Future Publishing at the time, got in touch with me. Future was planning a new Super Nintendo magazine, and he had the idea of doing it with a Japanese slant. This was because there were a lot more games coming out in Japan at that point. Fates collided because he found an issue of our magazine and asked me if I wanted to do an illustration for this new magazine. I did the cover for the first issue, and it seemed to go down well – so they asked me to do another for the second, and so it went on.

Walk us through the process of creating those early covers.

This was pre-Photoshop, so I would paint them like animation cels. I'd draw them out, do all the line work and inking and then take them to this place that would create a photomechanical transfer onto a sheet of acetate. Then I would literally paint it like an animation cel. I'd buy some animation paints and paint it on the reverse. I think by the nature of it being created like an animation cel, this gave it a look that was authentic, but also a commonality between the images that influenced its style.

What led you to becoming a full-time designer on *Super Play*?

I did about a year's worth of covers for *Super Play* as a freelancer. The anime magazine was going OK. We were putting out an issue every other month but weren't really making enough money to work on it full time. But I was learning more about how to use computers for DTP. I believe one of the designers had moved off *Super Play* and they saw that I had been doing the design of *Anime UK* using a computer. So, it all kind of meshed. They asked me if I wanted to come in for a chat and would consider working on the mag full time. So, I went down to Bath, and they offered me the job.

What sort of stuff were you doing on *Super Play*?

I was doing page layout and illustrations. Part of the deal was me doing a cover each month, but now I had to fit that into working a proper day on the magazine. There was also the sub's image, Neko The Tiger, who they would try to torture each month to get people to subscribe. Those images would sometimes turn out to be as complicated as the cover image. Also, I was now on a cramped desk trying to paint these cels. It wasn't until around a year later that Photoshop and computers reached a point that I could replicate the process digitally.

I REMEMBER WHEN

MARRIED TO THE JOB

On my wedding day I had to wait for a courier to collect a *Super Play* cover, much to my wife's annoyance. I wasn't late, but it was right on the edge. Unfortunately, I can't remember what cover that was.

I REMEMBER WHEN

REWRITING CAPTIONS

When working on *Super Play*, I used to get annoyed when freelancers would review import games and write 'funny' captions deriding Japanese games, so I would just rewrite them.

My BEST PRESS TRIP

VISITING FRANKFURT

It's quite unusual for magazine designers to go on press trips, but it would be fair to say that Wil wasn't your average designer. He got to go on a couple, and his most memorable is linked to *N64 Magazine*'s infamous *Ocarina Of Time* review, which ran across two issues and caused a bit of a backlash as a result. "I went to Germany to play *Ocarina Of Time*," shares Wil. "Nintendo Of Europe had taken over this place outside of Frankfurt, which was like a living medieaval museum. We went over there and played it for a whole day – as much as you could fit in and as far as you could get. We split the coverage over two issues, and I did sort of a preview. It read like a review, but we didn't give it a score, which is what most people were upset about. The following issue, Jes Bickham had the final game, and he did the review. That feature still holds a special place for me because I did it all – I attended the trip, played the game, wrote the preview and designed the feature.

» Wil occasionally drew covers for *N64 Magazine* – his *Perfect Dark* illustrations helped to get him noticed by Rare.

» An anime-inspired sketch of Joanna Dark for *Perfect Dark Zero* – Wil's first videogame project at Rare.

Occasionally, you'd also write for the magazine. Tell us about that.

As a page layout designer, you didn't really get involved with what went into the magazine, but because I was a fan I would try. As time went on, Zy Nicholson was onboard as a writer, and Jason Brookes had moved on to Edge. Tony Mott came on to *Super Play* as well. I got on well with them, and so we would all collaborate on what we thought was the best thing to go into the magazine. They seemed to trust what I said, and I would do little bits of writing. Towards the end of my time at *Super Play*, I was freelance writing for *Official PlayStation Magazine*, *GamesMaster* – I even did some stuff for *Edge*.

> "It wasn't like the cartoons that I watched as a kid; it was like cartoons on steroids. They were well drawn and a lot more detailed"
> WIL OVERTON

What's your favourite *Super Play* cover?

I've always said that my favourite *Super Play* cover is issue 30 – the *Mega Man* one where they had the characters facing off against each other and the text ran down the middle. You didn't see that very often. I remember there was an internal competition each month where Future would give an award to the best cover each month, and you'd get a free meal out of it. We won it that month.

There was always a lot of RPG love in *Super Play*, why was that?

We had that dedicated spread, Fantasy Quest, and the editorial team would buy a lot of Japanese games magazines to see what the latest thing was. You only had to glance through an issue of *Famitsu* to see that some of the biggest games were these RPGs. But they weren't quite like the RPGs we knew. You followed a story rather than creating your own character and doing whatever you liked.

Tell us about the closure of *Super Play* and how that came about?

Super Play was beginning to wind down. The team was smaller as the releases were drying up. Certainly, when the PlayStation arrived that was the time when we felt well how long is this going to continue for. Because surely Nintendo would release a 3D console. And sure enough, they announced the N64. We did an issue that was a magazine inside a magazine. It was called *Hyper Play* – it had an N64 focus and ran in *Super Play*. I was left to sort of do that on my own.

Can you tell us more about creating Hyper Play. Is sounds interesting?

I thought if I could just do something then maybe we could carry *Super Play* on into the N64 and call it *Hyper Play*. But it wasn't to be. As much as they tried to champion it, eventually everything was wound down. We were told that the issue after the next would be the last, and we couldn't change that. There was no talk of another Nintendo magazine at that point. I was moved

I REMEMBER WHEN

ULTIMATE LOOT BOX

When I joined Future, I discovered a big chest in the office with all my original cover illustrations inside. They had already been scanned and were taking up space, so I was able to take them back. I've still got a lot of them in a portfolio here.

» Wil also wrote for Future's magazines. Here's his *Mega Man X2* review for *Super Play*.

onto *GamesMaster* and worked on that for around a year – again, doing page layouts and stuff.

We didn't know that! How long were you on the magazine for?

I don't think many people realised that I had moved to *GamesMaster*. I was there for just under a year. The whole style of the magazine wasn't really my thing, and I didn't do any covers for them. In terms of design, *GamesMaster* was a nightmare of things everywhere – every page was an explosion. I remember my first day there, the QuarkXPress files were just nightmarish – you couldn't tell where things were, with things on different layers. You'd move something and it would break half the page.

Can you tell us how the launch of *N64 Magazine* came about?

It was Jonathan Davies, who had worked on lots of magazines at Future, including the mighty *Amiga Power* and *Super Play* in the early days, and then I believe had gone off to do PC stuff. He was a well-respected writer and editor and wanted to do an N64 magazine. He championed that and suddenly it was going to be a thing, so he asked me to come onboard. I don't think they really wanted to do an N64 magazine at the time. I think they just gave in to Jonathan and said he could have a few people, and a certain amount of budget, to give it a go and make a mag!

Do you think it was seen internally as a spiritual successor to *Super Play*?

No, I don't think they viewed it as a *Super Play* successor. Jonathan and I did talk about the whole Japanese influence, and me doing the covers, but there just didn't seem to be that same anime vibe to N64 games – even the stuff that was coming out of Japan. So, we decided not to do that. We created a magazine for the N64 audience – which wasn't a hardcore anime and import game audience.

How did you plan the content that would feature in each issue?

In the early days, we'd take one or two of the big games, something like *Wave Race 64*, and go all in. The review would be massive, stretching multiple pages, and it wouldn't just be a review; it would be lots of artwork, course breakdowns and all this stuff. This meant those big reviews would always be complicated to layout. We went over deadline on a lot of issues at the start.

Did you draw any covers for *N64 Magazine*?

I would occasionally draw one, when we didn't have anything to put on the cover, but I was doing a lot more work on layouts and illustration to go behind images. I remember I did one for the N64 *Goemon* game. We literally had one render of him standing there and knew that every other magazine would have the same image. I did all these different backgrounds to surround it and make it more than it was.

Didn't you also do something similar for *Perfect Dark*?

MY PROUDEST MOMENT

That I've managed to stay making a living out of this stuff for so long, which is amazing. There have been a lot of games magazines over the years and the two that I was mostly involved in seem to still be well liked. There is a lot of love for *Super Play* and *N64 Magazine*, still. That's certainly not all me, it's all the people who worked on them – all the brilliant writers. But I like to think I had a little hand in each of those. There was a feature in *Edge* once about games magazines and Zy wrote that he thought I was the heart of, and Oli Frey, of *Super Play*. That was nice. I thought what a compliment because Oli was an amazing artist. Those magazines, *Crash* and *Zzap!64*, I bought them every month.

> "As a page layout designer, you didn't really get involved with what went into the magazine, but because I was a fan I would try" WIL OVERTON

MEMORABLE ART GIG

HOW WIL HELPED TO LAUNCH A STAR FOX MISSION

When Wil started at Rare, he got the chance to see *Dinosaur Planet* running on the N64. Later, he would play a role in helping to visualise what meshing it with one of Nintendo's most popular videogame franchises would look like. "I was working on *Perfect Dark Zero* at the time and Tim Stamper asked if I could draw Fox McCloud," remembers Wil. "I said yes, so he asked if I could draw him as if he was starring in *Dinosaur Planet* – take the main character, which was a dog called Sabre at that point, and turn him into Fox. I only had 20 minutes to do this because it was being faxed to Shigeru Miyamoto. I managed it and that was the start of the game morphing into *Star Fox Adventures*.

» Wil also drew the mascot characters for the magazines he worked on – such as poor old Neko The Tiger, who the team would torture for subs.

I REMEMBER WHEN

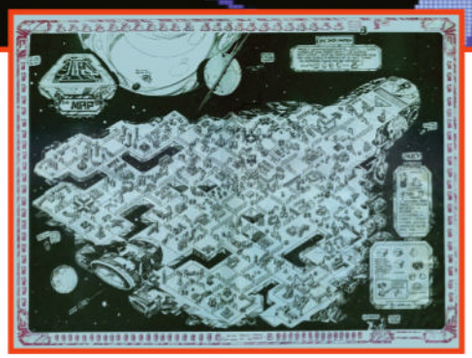
CREATING WORLDY BLOKE

On *N64 Magazine*, the debate was always should we have a mascot. At one point, I drew this anthropomorphic globe with a face on it. It wasn't meant to be a mascot – I think I thought it would be used for a 'games around the world' section. That character stayed for every issue.

Perfect Dark was coming out and we'd done some stories about it in *N64 Magazine*. There were a few renders that Rare had done of Joanna Dark with her chrome leg armour. Every magazine was covering it and had these images, and if you look at those early renders and compare them to the actual in-game model, the outfits are completely different. So, I said I'd try to draw something that sat somewhere in the middle, in a comic-book style.

Tell us about working on the *Perfect Dark* series at Rare. How did that come about?

At that point I had been at Future for seven or eight years and was thinking should I stay or do something else. There was a guy at Rare who I talked to regularly about artwork for *N64 Magazine*. I wrote to him one day to ask if Rare ever used concept artists. It turned out they didn't have concept artists – the 3D artists would just draw the promotional art at the end of a game's development. Games were getting more complicated, so they were thinking that they probably did need to have a process for concepting stuff before it moved to the modelling stage. So, they offered me a job, and I was told that I would be working on a sequel to *Perfect Dark*. Later, I learnt that Tim and Chris Stamper, who were running Rare at the time, had a poster of that Joanna Dark image I created on the wall in their office.



» The impressive *Alien 8* map that Wil drew and submitted to *Crash* – marking his first piece of artwork in print.

What can you tell us about working on *Perfect Dark Zero*?

The project took five years and when I joined it was on GameCube, which was just about to come out. Then the Microsoft buyout happened and suddenly we were on Xbox. It took so long that the project then moved to the Xbox 360. So that game was on three different systems, and of course each system brings with it the technology that allows you to do X, Y and Z. The Xbox 360 was bump mapping and shaders and things to make textures look shiny. So, each time the art style changed. At one point I went from being the concept artist on it to being the art director.

> "I've always been a person that likes doing the thing rather than going to meetings about the thing"
> WIL OVERTON

Can you describe those different visual iterations of the game?

» *Anime UK* began as a fanzine, but soon became a fully fledged mag. It also led to Wil getting his *Super Play* gig.

My FUTURE CLASSIC

BAKERU

I'm going for *Bakeru,* which is like the spiritual successor to *Goemon* on the Switch. I played it last year on import and really liked that. I don't know if I would consider it a classic, but I haven't enjoyed a game as much as that in a long time. The levels and the variety just kept going and going.

It went from something like *XIII*, the cel-shaded FPS with a comic-book feel, to something more in the Japanese style (similar in look to *Crimson Tears* on the PS2). I liked that look because it had a Japanese tinge whilst keeping the cel-shaded aesthetic. It looked really stylised. We went down that route for a bit. Then, once we got on to the 360, all this texture mapping came along. It immediately lent itself to more realism in the backgrounds and that sort of took the characters along with it.

How did you find the experience of working as an art director on a big game?
I've always been a person that likes doing the thing rather than going to meetings about the thing, so I did it for a while but went back to being the concept artist. It got to a point where I wasn't sure if I really wanted to do this, and almost went back to Future to help launch *NGamer* magazine with Mark Green. In the end it was a money thing, which is horrible to say as I would have quite liked to have done it. We would have had to move back to Bath from the Midlands. So, in the end I didn't take it, I stayed at Rare.

What made you decide to eventually leave Rare?
I was at Rare for 11 years, from 2000 to 2011, and then there was a big change. The studio was leaning into the *Kinect Sports* titles, and it felt like a natural time for me to go. After that I did various other things, working for some other studios and doing freelance illustration – kids' books and stuff like that.

You also found yourself working on magazines again with *NGamer*.
When I started, they said they just wanted mascots for different sections of the mag. I did a selection of different characters; a couple fell by the wayside but there was a robot one for the retro section – he stayed for quite a while.

» The *Alien 8* statue that Wil received for winning Ultimate Play the Game's map-drawing competition in *Crash*.

I think that was pretty much the only thing I did. I think I did one review at some point. And then of course I did the final cover when it was *Nintendo Gamer*, because I think they felt it tied it all together from *Super Play*.

You're now back at Rare, so what are you doing these days?
I'm doing UI art, so in-game stuff – which was a nice change to be honest. Concept art is a weird thing. Back in the day you could do it in any style. Nowadays, it seems to have moved into this fine art, painterly style that you would typically see in a lot of movie concepts. There are a lot of talented concept artists at Rare, and I didn't feel that I fitted in doing that sort of stuff anymore. But I enjoy the UI stuff, and the team is great. ✱

I REMEMBER WHEN

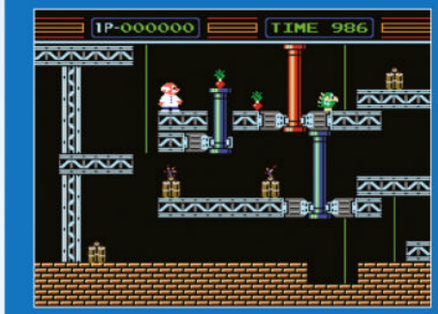
WIL'S CRASH DEBUT
I entered the map-drawing competition in *Crash* for Ultimate Play The Game's *Alien 8* and won. Normally, Oliver Frey would redraw the maps because most were sent in on graph paper, but they used mine! It was the first time my art ever appeared in a magazine.

ROB: Robotic Operating Buddy

» **PLATFORM:** NES » **YEAR:** 1985
» **COST:** £159.99 (launch, packaged with NES Deluxe Set), £300+ (today, boxed with console), £130+ (today, unboxed without console)

The introduction of the Family Computer Robot in the summer of 1985 might seem an odd move, but it's really not – after all, Nintendo had been in the business of toy manufacturing for a very long time. Sold for ¥9,800 with no games, the battery-operated robot required both physical accessories and game cartridges to work, sensing the screen using similar technology to lightguns. It wasn't the most exciting device due to its slow movements, but it was a cute novelty.

The accessory was far more important to the North American launch of the NES. Recoloured to match the console and renamed ROB, the robot was a key part of Nintendo's pitch to retailers that had been burned by the videogame market crash, positioning the machine as a much more palatable toy. The move was a success and the console soon proved far more popular than ROB, so only two games were released for it. Despite this, a standalone version of ROB was available for some time in North America – unlike in PAL regions, where it was only bundled with consoles. ✱



ESSENTIAL GAME

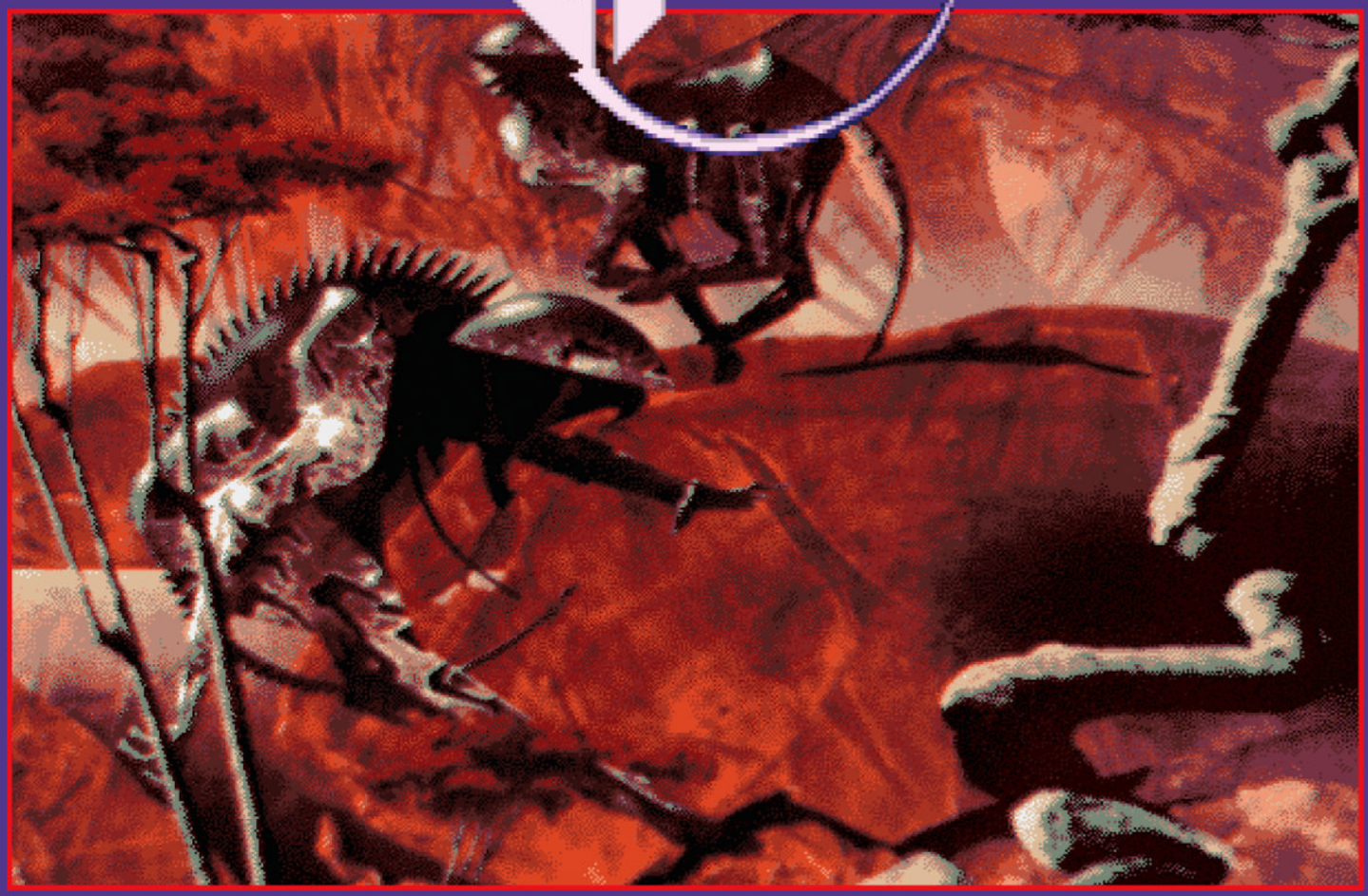
Gyromite

It's not easy to experience ROB today, since the peripheral is not only expensive, but relies on a CRT display. Whereas *Gyromite* was bundled with the NES Deluxe Set, *Stack-Up* was available separately and we'd feel mean telling you to seek it out, adding additional expense and inconvenience to your experience. Fortunately, *Gyromite* happens to be the better game. You alternate between controlling Professor Hector on the screen as he tries to defuse the dynamite in his laboratory, and controlling ROB to move coloured pillars that obstruct the professor's progress.

ROB: Robotic Operating Buddy fact

■ ROB has appeared in more Nintendo games than it was ever compatible with, including the *Super Smash Bros* series, *F-Zero GX*, *Mario Kart DS* and *Tomodachi Life*.

A TRIBUTE TO PSYGNOSIS



INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE FOR ITS STYLISH COVERS AND IN-GAME ART, PSYGNOSIS PUBLISHED HITS LIKE SHADOW OF THE BEAST AND LEMMINGS BEFORE MAKING GAMING COOL WITH WIPEOUT. FORMER PSYGNOSIS ART MANAGER JEFF BRAMFITT LOOKS BACK AT THE ILLUSTRIOUS STUDIO

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

After forming in the mid-Eighties from the ashes of Imagine Software, Psygnosis announced its arrival with *Brataccas* – a 16-bit reworking of Imagine's so-called 'megagame' *Bandersnatch*.

In 1987, the firm found success with the in-house developed *Terrorpods* and *Barbarian*, and in 1989 it did well with the externally developed shooter *Blood Money*. It also scored its first major hit in 1989 when it published the stylish arcade adventure *Shadow Of The Beast*, and two years later it released *Lemmings*, a cute strategy game that eclipsed the sales of many of its previous titles.

Psygnosis products for 1992 included the stunning shmup *Agony*, and in 1993 the studio embraced FMV with its 3D shooters *Microcosm* and *Novastorm*.

Based on its extensive experience of creating 3D visuals, Psygnosis was bought by Sony in 1993, and while it continued to publish work by other developers across systems it focussed its own efforts on Sony's forthcoming PlayStation.

The studio's 1995 future racer *WipEout* was a hit PlayStation launch title and nothing short of a reimagining of videogames as an art form. The polygon shooter *Colony Wars* and the 3D copter sim *G-Police* gave the firm two more successes in 1997.

Sequels to these three PlayStation originals arrived in 1998 and 1999, along with the heavily delayed PC blaster *Tellurian Defence*. 1999 was also the year when Psygnosis was renamed and amalgamated into Sony; however popular franchises such as *Lemmings* and *WipEout* continued to keep memories of the groundbreaking studio alive for many years after. ✱

JEFF BRAMFITT

One of the first Psygnosis artists and the studio's art manager for several years, Jeff Bramfitt worked on and oversaw the visuals for much of its output. Jeff retrained after leaving the games industry in 2007, and after years working in other sectors he is now a gentleman of leisure.

TERRORPODS

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1987

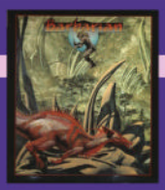
■ The part trading game/part shooter *Terrorpods* sees you driving around an alien world with the aim of bartering resources with colonies. Your ultimate objective is to construct a tripod-like Terrorpod. Opposing you are colony-raiding opponents that you either have to blast or avoid.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

Terrorpods was well under way when I started at Psygnosis. I did the little animated sequence at the beginning and some star-filled backgrounds. The cover was from an illustration Roger Dean did for a *War Of The Worlds* article. I loved sci-fi at the time, and I suddenly found myself in a situation where someone was paying me to draw monsters and spaceships. I was thinking, 'Wait a minute, this can't be right!'"

BARBARIAN

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1987



■ *Barbarian*'s controls turn an otherwise standard platformer into something quite unique. Enemies are fought with swords or bows and arrows, traps have to be avoided and environments have to be navigated – but this is all done by clicking icons with the mouse.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

For *Barbarian*'s intro I was just told to do a muscle-bound bloke in as few frames as possible, and that was it – off you go! There was a bit of a Roger Dean-style background and a logo where I used as many colours as I could. Like other intros I did, it was painfully slow; because once you had drawn a lovely picture you wanted it to be on the screen for as long as possible!"

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

■ Look beyond *Shadow Of The Beast*'s stunning visuals and you find a sequence of precision-based challenges interspersed with exploration and punctuated with tense boss fights. Punching foes and avoiding moving hazards requires exact timing, and progress also depends on finding objects to overcome obstacles.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

We didn't do the original graphics for *Shadow Of The Beast* at Psygnosis, that was mostly Martin Edmondson. But style over substance was Psygnosis all over, and the criticism of *Shadow Of The Beast* was the criticism of nearly every game we ever did. Ian Hetherington knew that and he didn't care. Sometimes people literally bought the games for the box art. You got the free T-shirt and the poster, and all the rest of it. You might not get great gameplay, but you got the full package."

DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

A BREAKDOWN OF THE GROUNDBREAKING PLATFORMER

GORGEOUS GRAPHICS

■ Designed around the Amiga's graphics hardware rather than the ST's, *Beast* looks like an animated Roger Dean painting and is a showcase for Commodore's 16-bit system.

SCI-FI STORYLINE

■ Some games' backstories seem superfluous, but *Shadow Of The Beast*'s objective of regaining its hero's humanity stays with you as you guide him through the levels.

ECLECTIC MECHANICS

■ To begin with, *Shadow Of The Beast* limits you to exploration and fending off one-hit enemies, but lock-and-key puzzles and ranged weapons follow, and you eventually get a jetpack.

ODD OPPONENTS

■ As well as gigantic versions of real animals such as bats and insects, *Beast* pits you against human/animal hybrids and fantasy creatures like dragons and gargoyles.

NIGHTMARISH MAYORS

■ The bosses in *Beast* are vast monstrosities. Prepare yourself to face a Giger-esque sabre-toothed behemoth and a blood red triceratops that's been turned inside out!

BAAL

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

There's nothing inherently difficult about *Baal*'s platforming and creature blasting, but these seemingly straightforward tasks require dedication. More specifically, its monsters take multiple hits to dispatch and they respawn not long after, and you somersault instead of jumping, making aerial acrobatics an acquired skill.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

I was told to do something fun for *Baal*'s title graphics, something daft, so I just took an image from an old Hollywood movie. I was an old movie buff, so I used to have loads of movie books, and I just trawled through them to get inspiration. It might have been from *Samson And Delilah*, it was something with a god in the background. But I pinched an image of a god, and I think I did the logo as well and the extro screen, because the external developer didn't have anybody to do that kind of stuff."

BLOOD MONEY

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

Credit should go to *Blood Money*'s publisher Psygnosis and developer DMA Design for differentiating it from its inspiration *Mr Heli*. That said, it by and large borrows the arcade title's mechanics wholesale. The idea is that you traverse four themed planets with a different vehicle – a helicopter, submarine, jetpack and spaceship. That's one of *Blood Money*'s distinguishing features. It also has entirely different stages from *Mr Heli*'s, although three of them look suspiciously like some found in Irem's more famous coin-op *R-Type*. Blasting enemies releases coins that you spend on better weapons, just like in *Mr Heli*, but in *Blood Money* you get to choose from a selection rather than being offered solitary upgrades. However, the Psygnosis game's killer option is a simultaneous two-player mode, which its arcade counterpart lacks.

INFESTATION

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

What's interesting about *Infestation* is that it doesn't offer a great deal more in the way of gameplay than the similar 3D title *Driller*. But where that earlier effort was developed around the limitations of 8-bit computers, *Infestation* was designed for the Amiga, and as such it's an altogether faster, slicker and more immersive experience. It starts on a planet's surface where you have to activate a transporter and beam down to an alien-infested research colony. The aliens attack long before you get there, although you have a jetpack with limited fuel that allows you to stay out of their reach. Once in the colony, you find yourself in a maze of corridors populated by alien eggs and their guardians, plus objects that you have to find a use for.

MEMORABLE MECHANICS

THE GAMEPLAY THAT DEFINES THE ALIEN INVASION TITLE

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

There's lots to do in *Infestation*, but the main point of the game is to destroy 167 alien eggs. This requires you to find and deploy canisters of cyanide gas.

EPIC EXPLORATION

Infestation's research colony is a network of connected rooms, and many look similar, which makes things tricky if you don't make a map to chart your progress.

MULTIPLE MODES

Infestation separates exploration from observation. In Tactical mode you move and shoot things; in Reconnaissance mode you can pan 360 degrees and get items.

OBJECT LESSON

Every object in Infestation has a purpose, but you have to pick them up to find out what they are, and even then you have to work out what some are used for.

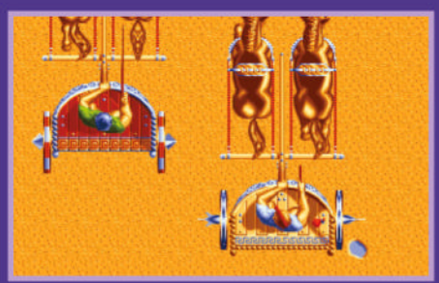
CARTHAGE

AMIGA, ATARI ST • 1990

A tactical strategy game with occasional arcade interludes thrown in, *Carthage* impresses as much with its polished visuals as it does with its engrossing gameplay. Much of the action takes place on a world map, where you fund armies that go into battle for you.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

Carthage was mostly designed by Dave Worrall, it was something me and Dave almost did on the side. I think someone said to just knock something together; we must have had some spare time. It had a bit of action, a bit of cinematics and a bit of strategy. I don't really deserve any credit for the design of that other than the way it looked. But me and Dave got on really well, and we literally just banged it together. There was a little 3D in there with the chariots because we could, and why not? There was a bit of 3D with the world map too. We pretty much threw the kitchen sink at it. It was to test stuff as well, because in those days a lot of the games we did were experimental."



ECLECTIC OBJECTIVES

THE GOALS SET BY THE COMPELLING STRATEGY GAME

CONSIDERED COMBAT

Your priority is to protect Carthage from Romans. This is where your main army and chariot racer are based.

ARMY MOVES

Each city in the Carthagean Empire has reserves, but you need to send the Carthage army to form infantries from them.

SPECIAL FORCES

You can't buy catapults or elephants to take into battle, but some are found in the cities of the Carthagean Empire.

CHARIOT CHAOS

Bolstering infantries requires cash, and the fastest way to get it to them is to send your chariot racer out with it.

CASH FLOW

You raise funds by taxing cities, but if your chariot racer is run off the road you lose the money that he was carrying.

LEMMINGS

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991

The key to the massive Psygnosis hit is guiding groups of cute but stupid lemmings across various levels to their exits, which would be simple if the stages weren't so dangerous. You assign individuals skills, like digging or climbing, which allow them to safely overcome the obstacles in their way.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

I think everybody knew *Lemmings* was going to do well. Some of the artists tested it. This was before the company was very big, and we only had a couple of testers. We just got hooked instantly, and it was obvious that because of its gameplay it was going to take off. It was so original and so clever, and it sucked you in. You played it and you wondered what happened to the last three hours, had you really just been digging little holes? I just helped out on the intro and that was it. We knew we were onto a winner, so we just finished it as quickly as we could. The thing about *Lemmings* was that it didn't need a fancy intro because it was going to sell anyway."

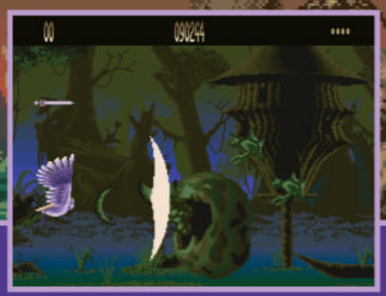
SHADOW OF THE BEAST III

AMIGA • 1992

In comparison to the original *Shadow Of The Beast*, the third part in the trilogy is no less stylish than its predecessor, but it has far less emphasis on exploration and it's far more action orientated. This shift in gameplay is something that is in no small part helped by the sequel's hero having a ranged weapon and multiple foes to take care of from the outset. *Shadow Of The Beast III* also benefits greatly from introducing a series of logistic challenges to overcome rather than retaining the straightforward lock-and-key puzzles that were seen in the first game.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

I didn't really have the time to play games during the day, and the rest of my time was fairly hedonistic, so there wasn't a great deal of sitting at home playing games. But I had done loads of conversions of *Shadow Of The Beast*, so I knew what the *look* was. So I did an intro and cutscenes for *Beast III*. There was a sequence with a plane flying over a volcano that gets hit by lightning, I'd completely forgotten about that until recently."



AGONY

AMIGA • 1992

■ Another beautiful-looking Psygnosis title and another whose visuals take their influence from the science fantasy artwork found on book and LP covers during the Seventies. It also has an intense soundtrack, and far more importantly, *Agony* delivers in terms of gameplay. Developed by the Belgian developer Art & Magic, *Agony* sees you playing as a Barn Owl in a shooter where you use its calls to decimate wave after wave of demonic opponents before facing their end of level overlords. As you progress through the stages, you can power-up your owl's screech, add flying swords to its offensive capabilities and collect spells that bolster your attempts to repel its hellish enemies. Safe spaces are at a premium thanks to foes spitting out projectiles and generally packing the screen, making strategic positioning a vital aspect of making progress.

FLYING LESSONS

HOW TO TACKLE THE VISUALLY STUNNING SHOOTER

FOE FORMATIONS

■ Work out the attack patterns of enemies as soon as they appear on-screen in order to best position yourself to blast or avoid them.

PERIODIC POWER-UPS

■ Your primary weapon is your owl's screech, and although it starts off weak you can upgrade it by collecting pick-ups.

SWORD REWARDS

■ Dispatching waves of foes pays off, and in two cases it gets you swords that float above or below you, taking out demons as they go.

SUPERB SPELLS

■ Your third method of attack is facilitated by collectable spells that are cast via a menu and are best saved for taking out bosses.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

■ The mayors fire projectiles instead of attacking you directly, so your skill at avoiding them while blasting back is all-important.

AQUAVENTURA

AMIGA • 1992

■ It's admirable that this partly polygon Amiga shooter boasts a 3D world with 360-degree movement, but it's unsurprising that there's some sprite scaling involved. As well as alien craft and energy generators, you're tasked with toppling end of level guardians.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

Aquaventura was really just a way to show that we could do 3D. It showed that we were going with the times; that we were ahead of the times even. I think I just did some in-game sprites. *Aquaventura* was Ian Hetherington's project I think, in terms of the in-game 3D aspect. Jim Bowers did all the intro sequences, because he was really into cinematics. But Ian wanted to see if we could do a 3D game. It wasn't something he pushed for until the early Nineties when we started looking at games like Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer*. Then the penny dropped about where games were going to go. So *Aquaventura* was answering the question, 'Can we do a 3D game?'"

MICROCOSM

FM TOWNS, VARIOUS • 1993

■ It's easy to forget just how impressive Full Motion Video seemed back in the early Nineties, and just how novel an experience *Microcosm* delivered. Its sci-fi intro movie sets the scene for a game that plays like *Space Harrier*, although you pilot submarines in addition to flying around in a suit. As well as branching paths, there are weapons upgrades, smart bombs, boss fights and an epic techno soundtrack.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

Microcosm had people dotted all around the building doing different things, and then we tied it all together at the end. There were new platforms coming out that gave us loads of graphics power and data storage, so you could throw more stuff at the screen. *Microcosm* had a massive intro sequence, and all of the actors in it – and I use the word 'actors' loosely – were Psygnosis artists. I was one of them, but I think I got cut."

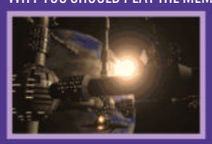
NOVASTORM

FM TOWNS, VARIOUS • 1993

■ One of the best FMV titles ever made, *Novastorm* uses the format to its advantage instead of allowing the technology to restrain its ambitions. The Psygnosis shooter is far greater than the sum of its parts, but at the same time those parts work so well when you consider them individually. Its gameplay is of primary importance, of course, and this is near perfectly gauged. Its waves of one-hit enemies never outstay their welcome and are followed by huge visually stunning bosses. The route through its highly varied rendered environments is on-rails, but unlike landscapes in other FMV games if you make contact with them then you take damage – which is communicated by sounds of wrenching metal as your ship takes a hit. Your craft's blasters emit a muted tone, and this complements *Novastorm*'s superlative trance music. Last but not least, short stylish cutscenes punctuate each phase of the game and announce the next. The end result is both an assault on the senses and an intense arcade shmup.

FMV FUN

WHY YOU SHOULD PLAY THE MEMORABLE ON-RAILS SHOOTER



CINEMATIC COOL

■ *Novastorm*'s immersive pre-game intro employs live footage interspersed with pre-rendered visuals to imagine a distant future where humanity's machines are threatening to kill off their makers.

MAKING WAVES

■ The attack patterns of your opponents change constantly and the direction fresh foes appear from is equally unpredictable. Wiping out entire waves releases power-ups, so you have to go for broke.

EPIC ENVIRONMENTS

■ Ever-changing landscapes depict extreme conditions such as volcanoes, scorched deserts, mountain ranges and frozen wastelands, plus visual spectacles like the northern lights and hefty asteroid belts.

MAGNIFICENT BOSSES

■ These vast engines of destruction come thick and fast. They have natural forms despite being hued from metal. Their size makes it equally easy to hit their weak spot or get hit by their defences.

FLINK

CD32, VARIOUS • 1994

■ There are various aspects to *Flink* that set it apart from other Nineties 16-bit platformers. One of its most distinguishing features is its unique world, which is depicted with ornate visuals that bring to mind medieaval Scandinavia. Its characters are in keeping with this look and are equally idiosyncratic. Another of the game's distinct features relates to its hero Flink being a wizard's apprentice. He can use magic to help him overcome obstacles and opponents, but first he needs to find spells and then the ingredients that they require. Once secured, these have to be combined as directed, and then Flink is able to cast a spell. Locating ingredients is half of the fun, as these are found by opening treasure chests or defeating enemies – both of which are achieved by jumping on them *Mario*-style. Lastly, there are endless platforming challenges that are both varied and highly imaginative.

WIPEOUT

PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS • 1995

■ It's tempting to chalk *WipEout* up to serendipity, but it was actually the result of years of research by Psygnosis into what 3D gaming might be. The studio's answer helped to launch the PlayStation and made gaming feel grown up; *WipEout* was an exercise in visual style and musical cool. What makes it a great racer is its breathlessly fast, highly manoeuvrable craft and its helter-skelter tracks. Master these and you're rewarded with a sublime gaming experience.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"There was usually a pub involved, and there certainly was in the case of *WipEout*. The original *WipEout* ship came from one time when Nick Burcombe and Jim Bowers were in the pub discussing a game. Jim had built a model; a lot of us were into building models at the time. But Jim was a model maker, and he had built a scratch model of one of the racers, and that was where *WipEout* all started from; his scratch-built model of one of the racers."

DISCWORLD

PC, VARIOUS • 1995

■ Based loosely on the Terry Pratchett novel *Guards! Guards!*, *Discworld* turns the surreal adventures of a wizard called Rincewind into a point-and-click adventure. Because it's based on a book, the characters in *Discworld* are prone to exposition, but because this is humorous it adds to the game rather than detracting from it. Sometimes it also advances the plot by providing you with clues for what to do next. As with all point-and-click games, your objective is to solve puzzles through exploration and interaction with other characters. Many of *Discworld*'s challenges require you to track down or trade for objects and creatures, which once secured can be combined to produce something of use. Very often, what you're looking for can be found by speaking to bystanders – as touched on previously – or by examining your environment, although doing so often results in a gag of some sort instead, which is welcome given the game's source material.

PERPLEXING PUZZLES

NOTABLE CHALLENGES SET BY THE HUMOROUS ADVENTURE

LAZY LUGGAGE

■ Rincewind needs his luggage for storage, but it's asleep. You need to poke it awake, so it's off to the broom cupboard.

FAIR TRADE

■ You require a specific book, but the librarian has been turned into an ape. Luckily you have a banana in your luggage.

MIRROR MIRROR

■ You need a dragon's breath, and a mirror is the ideal way to get it. The only problem is that it's on top of a flagpole.

CAMERA TRAP

■ Discworld cameras are boxes containing imps that paint pictures. To build one you have to catch an imp using a worm as bait.

BELT UP!

■ Bungee jumping off a flagpole using a rubber belt is pretty mad, but it lets you tear a stick-on tattoo you need off a sailor!

WIPEOUT 2097

PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS • 1996

■ Not only does *WipEout 2097* improve on the original in terms of visuals and variety of courses, but it's also more accessible thanks to its easier to control ships. The sequel also adds a new racing team and several new power-ups, including the tidal wave-like Quake Disruptor.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"At the time of *WipEout 2097* I was still art manager, so I just helped out a little bit. I think I did the stuff on the HUD, so the speed ramps and fonts for the text. It was partly to keep my hand in, and it was also all hands on deck. We pulled in people from other games and threw everything at it. We had to try to make it a little bit different from *WipEout*, but people essentially just wanted more tracks. I think we had more graphical scope, so we could use higher-resolution texture maps to cram more detail onto the ships and into the backgrounds."

COLONY WARS

PLAYSTATION • 1997

■ As you would expect from a Psygnosis title, *Colony Wars* is visually impressive, with its lighting and particle effects being of particular note, especially given the limitations of the PlayStation's hardware. The space combat sim is also worthy of praise for its slick mission-based story-led gameplay, which branches depending on how well or badly each challenge goes. This branching continues when your ship gets destroyed, as in this case your pilot ejects in an escape pod and lives to fight another day. The game's weapon-based mechanics are interesting too. Rather than constantly blasting opponents to kingdom come you more often have to first decimate their shields with purple lasers before taking them out with red lasers. There's a selection of ships that you take into battle, ranging from small fighters to mammoth navy frigates, and as you work your way up the ranks the stakes of your missions are raised and your weapons get more powerful. Not that you're always in a firefight, however, as some missions require you to capture targets using a grapple gun and in others you deploy non-destructive EMP to disable enemy craft.

G-POLICE

PLAYSTATION • 1997

■ Even if it hadn't been acknowledged by its developers, it's clear that *G-Police* was inspired by the sci-fi epic *Blade Runner*. More specifically, *G-Police* references the hover copters used by the cops in the movie. Also in keeping with *Blade Runner* is the setting for *G-Police*; a neon-lit, pollution-ridden metropolis of the future. There are several aspects to the game that help differentiate it from other combat flight simulations and help to maximise its gameplay. Missions take place in relatively small domes, meaning there are restrictions on how far you can fly in any direction, so you're never too far from the criminal you're pursuing, the squad car you're protecting, the bomb you're disposing of or the contraband you're seeking. Most domes have closely packed buildings everywhere you fly; giving you confined spaces to navigate your way through. Your craft can stop dead in the air, and rain ammo down at stationary ground targets or at aerial opponents that are heading towards you. There are also missions in non-urban domes, which give you more room to manoeuvre despite their limited space.

TELLURIAN DEFENCE

PC • 1998

■ About as different from *G-Police* as two flight combat sims could be, *Tellurian Defence* has open-world dogfights rather than confined pursue-and-destroy missions. The Psygnosis PC title lets you choose multiple weapons pre-mission and sets multi-target challenges, where you can choose which enemy your scanner should track. The game also impresses with its visual effects and catchy drum and bass soundtrack.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

We needed to get a game out because we had hired all these people over the previous few years and there was very little in the pipeline. So it was like, 'Shit! What are we going to use them for?' There was an awful lot of money and talent thrown at it. It was probably too ambitious, and that might have been an issue. The technology was changing all the time, and so was the management, so they kept changing the game. It took two or three years to make through all the iterations. It was probably a technical tour de force, but I don't think it sold very well."

WIP3OUT

PLAYSTATION • 1999

■ *Wip3out* was one of the few PlayStation titles to use its high-resolution mode, and this is reflected by its sharper, cleaner look. However there's far more to the game than just pretty visuals. There are three new teams to race for – meaning there are three new ships, there's also a new weapon in the form of multi-missiles and split-screen multiplayer for the first time in the *WipEout* series.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

Wip3out was mainly done at the Leeds studio. Nicky Place worked there, and just as a favour she asked if I would do some cutscenes because she was short on time. *Wip3out* was just after I'd dropped out of being the art manager. Everybody else was getting to play with 3D stuff and I wasn't, so I felt like I was missing the boat. We just tried to keep the same mood, because by that time the look of *WipEout* was established. The ships already existed, and all I did was build them and do an animated sequence with them. Not all of it, most of it had been done in Leeds. But I did some in Liverpool, and then they tacked it on."

BRILLIANT BOX ART

THE STYLISH ARTWORK THAT DEFINED PSYGNOSIS

■ The painted cover art that graced 16-bit Psygnosis games and the stylish box-art designs for its biggest PlayStation hits are the looks that the studio is best remembered for. Roger Dean often gets credit for painting the classic Psygnosis 16-bit covers, and he did provide more than most, however fellow sci-fi/fantasy artists Peter A Jones, Tim White and Melvyn Grant contributed some too. An entirely different style using clean lines and iconography became a Psygnosis hallmark during its PlayStation days. The Designers Republic defined the packaging for four *WipEout* titles, and similar Psygnosis cover art was designed by Richard Turner.

Zoop

TOO JAZZY?

» SNES » 1995 » PANELCOMP

Do you ever think about those times when a company is convinced that it has the next really big thing, and it just doesn't pan out? *Zoop* always felt like one of those games to me. With adverts declaring it the "largest killer of time" in the region and warning that "you may already be addicted", it seemed as though Viacom believed this action puzzler had the kind of breakout potential of something like *Tetris*. The publisher even ensured that it was out on every platform that seemed reasonably viable, plus the Atari Jaguar. Despite all of that, *Zoop* seems to have been generally forgotten by the gaming public.

Although it may not have lived up to those lofty expectations, *Zoop* is actually a pretty good little game. You control a coloured triangle that moves within a square at the centre of the screen. Various shapes spawn in at the edges of the screen, and you can press a button to shoot your triangle at them. It will clear away any shapes that share its colour until it either clears the entire line, or encounters a shape of a different colour – in which case it will swap colours with that shape. If a line of shapes grows so long that it enters your central square, it's game over. Surprisingly, some critics back in the mid-Nineties felt this was complex and unintuitive.

The gameplay is basic enough to be functionally identical across most platforms, and while the Game Boy gets an exclusive multiplayer mode, the sweet spot seems to be the 16-bit consoles – and not just because the colours help. You see, one of the game's defining features on most platforms is a smooth jazz soundtrack that's surprisingly likely to lodge itself in your memory, but the PlayStation and Saturn versions replace it with more generic electronic music. Are some slightly fancier visuals worth losing that kind of character? I would argue not. ✱

Scan For Free Magazines

0100
100200300
05

Ranger X

How mastery of the Mega Drive made for one of gaming's most impressive one-hit wonders

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** GAU ENTERTAINMENT

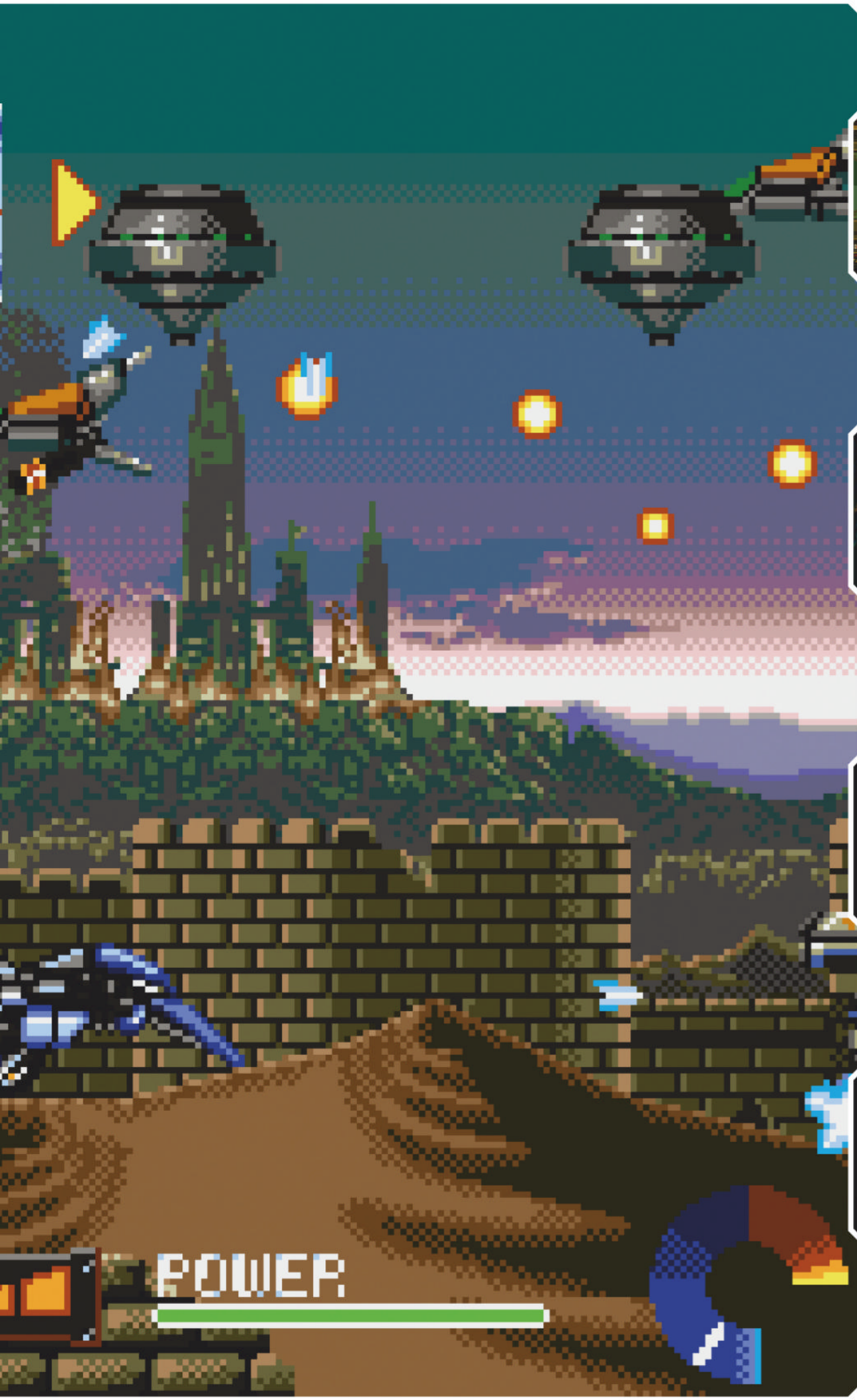
You probably haven't heard of Gau Entertainment, because the company only ever developed one game – *Ranger X*. This game puts you in charge of the titular robot, and your job is to traverse stages and destroy specific enemies before facing off against bosses. It's a simple premise, but there's a good amount of depth to it – you can walk and shoot in different directions, you have special weapons that are recharged with solar energy, and you get a jetpack and support vehicles.

There are seven tricky stages to tackle, and you'll be treated to exquisitely detailed sprites and frequent special effects as you explore them. From the opening desert stage that depicts a huge battle to the tower stage with cool reflection effects in the windows, *Ranger X* is one of the most visually impressive Mega Drive games. There are some good tunes in there too, with the military complex and factory stages standing out.

So how could such a talented team disappear? Well, Gau Entertainment had almost finished work on its next Mega Drive game in the spring of 1994, but was acquired by Nextech shortly before release. That game – *Soleil*, or *Crusader Of Centy* for our American readers – instead bore the new name on the title screen. Despite the action RPG being a wild departure from the team's first game, most of the same staff worked on it.

If you want to play *Ranger X* today, it's quite a sought-after game and commands a price that reflects that – complete North American copies can sell for as much as £70 and PAL copies are around the £100 mark. It's known in Japan as *Ex-Ranza*, and those copies tend to sell for around £130. It has rarely ever been re-released, most recently being included on the similarly scarce Mega Drive Mini II.

HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...

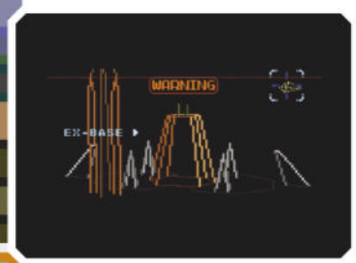


Layered Landscapes

Ranger X constantly makes clever use of the Mega Drive's background layer priorities and line scrolling ability to achieve many layers of parallax scrolling, and even pseudo-3D effects.

Luscious Light

Transparency effects on the Mega Drive often relied on dithered patterns. *Ranger X* instead employs the console's shadow and highlight mode to create smooth shafts of light in the caves.



Wire Work

The wireframe mission introductions are mightily impressive, and there's no extra hardware or pre-rendering trickery involved – this is all raw CPU grunt from the Mega Drive itself.

Ferocious Firepower

Ranger X throws a lot of sprites around the screen at some points, sometimes even enough to cause pixels to drop out – however, the developers managed to keep any slowdown to a minimum.

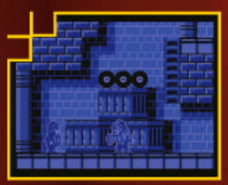
THE MAKING OF

TITUS THE FOX

WHETHER YOU WERE PLAYING AN AFFABLE ARABIAN MAN OR A FEARLESS FOX, THIS LARGE AND INVENTIVE RUN-AND-JUMP PLATFORMER WAS FULL OF FRENCH FLAIR, CAPTIVATING GAMERS WITH ITS MIX OF CUNNING PUZZLES AND ARTFUL ENEMIES WHO COULD BE DISPATCHED WITH WHATEVER YOU COULD GET YOUR HANDS ON

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

» To appeal to a wider, international audience, Titus decided to ditch the human character Moktar in favour of a fox – which happened to be Titus' logo.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FIRE & FORGET II
PLATFORM: SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, GX4000
RELEASED: 1990

THE BLUES BROTHERS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: DOS, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1991

PREHISTORIK 2
PLATFORM: DOS, AMSTRAD CPC
RELEASED: 1993

There must have been something rather odd in the English Channel in 1991. How else could you explain two songs reaching number one in the charts for many, many weeks on both sides of La Manche at roughly the same time?

In the United Kingdom the honour went to Bryan Adams' *(Everything I Do) I Do It For You,* a song which topped the country's hit parade for a record-breaking 16 weeks. In France, music 'lovers' joined forces to send Vincent Lagaf' and his repetitive, clichéd novelty song *La Zoubida* to the top for just shy of three months – but something particularly good came out of that one.

Having spied a golden opportunity to make some money, videogame publisher and developer Titus France decided to create a tie-in game based on La Zoubida's lyrics. The game would tell the tale of an Arabian man called Moktar who needed to travel from Paris to Marrakech to rescue a girl called Zoubida from the clutches of some evil bandits. It would be called – rather catchily – *Lagaf': Les Aventures de Moktar – Vol 1: La Zoubida.*

"Titus' boss Eric Caen had passed me in a hallway and he said, 'You're going to make a game with Lagaf','" explains programmer Eric Zmiro. "He added, 'You'll take the code from *The Blues Brothers* [a licensed big hit for Titus which had just been released] and you'll change the hero.'" But Eric had other ideas.

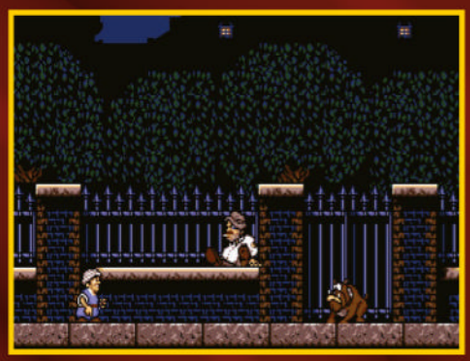
What emerged was a rather more inventive game – one which eventually became known as *Titus The Fox: To Marrakech And Back* for international audiences. "From the start, *Lagaf'* was meant to be a side-scrolling platform game," Eric says. "But following the hallway conversation, I went to check on the progress of the graphics for *Lagaf'* and there was nothing. It would take at least two months to get the first map so I had time to redo everything without using *The Blues Brothers*' code which was far too slow and clumsy."

Eric effectively started from scratch, working alone on an Amstrad 286 PC in an office. He began by coding a new sprite routine in 8086 assembler which he says was 300% faster than the one used by *The*

IN THE KNOW

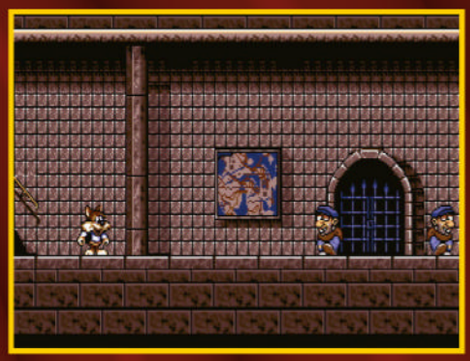
» **PUBLISHER:** TITUS FRANCE
» **DEVELOPER:** TITUS FRANCE
» **PLATFORM:** DOS, VARIOUS
» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM

» [PC] The original game was rather less cutesy due to the absence of a fox but the game was otherwise near-identical.



» [PC] There were loads of baddies in the game from drunk guys to dogs, each one superbly detailed.

» [PC] The game was familiar fare with ladders to climb, platforms to walk along and obstacles to contend with.



» [PC] Some of the characters had a distinct, stereotypical look about them.

Blues Brothers. "*The Blues Brothers*' sprite routine was written in C and to flip the sprite (turning it to the left while it is drawn to the right) its programmer had used a temporary buffer, "Eric says. "This returned each point of the sprite to a memory area and displayed the sprite from there. By developing a routine that returned the points at the same time as they displayed, I saved time. I also shifted and clipped and flipped the sprites in a single pass. This was very complicated to do and it took me two weeks working ten hours each day but the result is there to see."

> "I HAD TIME TO REDO EVERYTHING WITHOUT USING THE BLUES BROTHERS' CODE"
> ERIC ZMIRO

With the sprite routine in place, Eric had a firm foundation on which to build the rest of the game. "*The Blues Brothers* had few enemies and often identical enemies with ultra-simple behaviour," Eric explains. "The sprite routine completely changed the game. You could use as many sprites as you wanted, even large ones. In *Lagaf'*, the opponents had a much more important role."

Eric also included a dynamic object management system. "It allowed the main character to pick-up, place, stack, throw objects and so on which brought fresh life to the game," he says. The ability to grab and throw objects was a direct borrowing from *The Blues Brothers* and it forced players to see off enemies by lobbing boxes, bins, sacks and bottles. It prevented the game from becoming a straightforward 'jump-and-run' platformer and it ensured players needed to consider how they'd get themselves past any nasties they'd come across. In many cases, it'd be easier to jump, duck and crawl to navigate parts of each level which would also be useful in helping players avoid being hit.

Since Eric wanted the game to have a large number of enemies, players certainly needed to keep their wits about them. There were dogs, bees, flies and cats to contend with as well as kids, cooks, drunk guys and beefy blokes who could be picked up and thrown. There were also a good number of bosses such as an axe man and mummy and it all helped to put extra distance between *Lagaf'* and *The Blues Brothers*. "Everything ended up being redone, from the tools to the display," Eric says. Indeed, whenever *Lagaf'* was influenced by *The Blues Brothers*, Eric ensured his game would take the concept further.

"Everything was redone, from the tools to the display," Eric says. "The bonuses in the sky came from *The Blues Brothers* but those in *Lagaf'* were more sophisticated. Instead of copying the 16x16 block to the left when it's collected, the block below is memorised which allows players to discover new things when picking them up. And that changed everything."

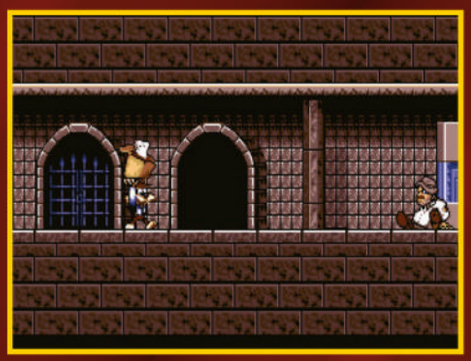
FEELING FOXY?

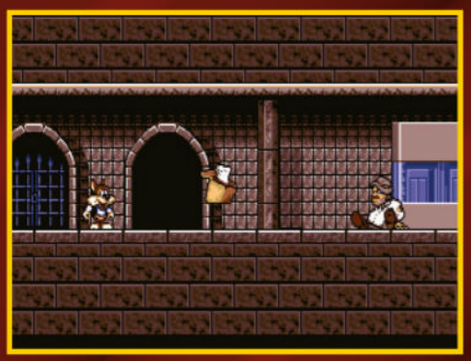
IT'S STILL POSSIBLE TO HAVE FUN WITH TITUS

■ You can play the PC version of *Titus The Fox* legitimately by going to Steam or GOG.com. The latter option includes *Lagaf': Les Aventures de Moktar – Vol 1: La Zoubida* so you can check out the differences between the two versions for yourself. You can then decide whether or not you want to delve even deeper by paying a visit to ttf.mine.nu

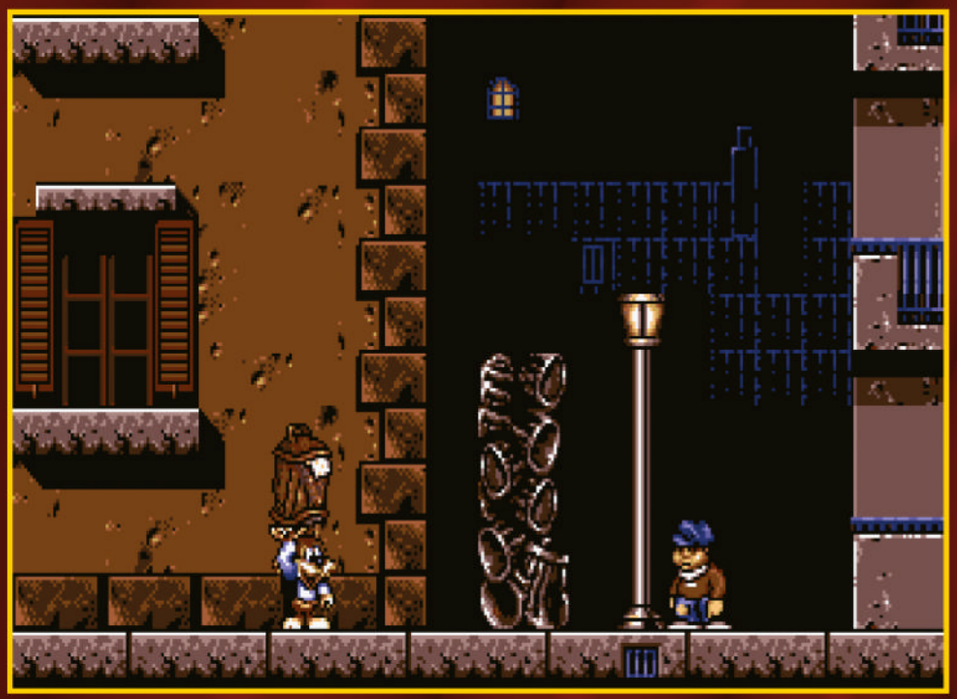
There you will find an excellent, comprehensive online resource dedicated to *Lagaf'/ Titus The Fox* at. As well as walkthroughs and level maps, the website allows you to download and play new levels via the PC version of the game. You can also go to Downloads where you'll find a level viewer and – perhaps more fun – a level editor which will let you get creative.

Once you've placed the relevant file into the *Titus The Fox* or *Lagaf'* directory, you're able to go straight to the viewer/editor and get cracking. You'll likely need to play around with it for a while before you figure out what you need to do but if you produce something you'd like to show off, you can then add it to the New Levels section of the website for others to play and enjoy.





» [PC] Various items strewn around the game could be picked up and thrown at enemies.



» [PC] You often had to make some pixel-perfect moves in order to get around the various levels.

▶ While Eric was working on the code, graphics artist Francis Fournier created some fiendishly good maps complete with secret passages, some of which were shortcuts. The late Christophe Gayraud also created the game's traps and placed the enemies. "The maps, traps and enemy placements were brilliantly done," says Eric.

The sprites and the backgrounds were produced using Deluxe Paint 2, with each level being 256 blocks long. "That was reminiscent of *The Blues Brothers*," Eric explains. "This was done for simpler addressing reasons (coord = y << 8 + x) and using 256 16x16 blocks saved memory." But although it may sound as if everything was meticulously planned out from the very start, that could not be further from the truth. Much of the development was actually completed on the fly.

"At Titus, there was no organisation, no written design, no planning and no project manager," Eric says. "The graphic artist and the programmer (it was often just the two of us!) decided everything based on ideas and inspiration – objects were included simply because I could. I'd think, 'Wait, it would be fun if we had a skateboard,' and an hour later, I'd be testing it and refining the gameplay until I had nothing to complain about. I'd also play a level and, if something bothered me, I'd modify it and go back to it. I did this for the project's nine-month duration."

Skateboards did indeed feature in the game, along with scooters and a magic carpet which allowed you to fly. There

CONVERSION CAPERS

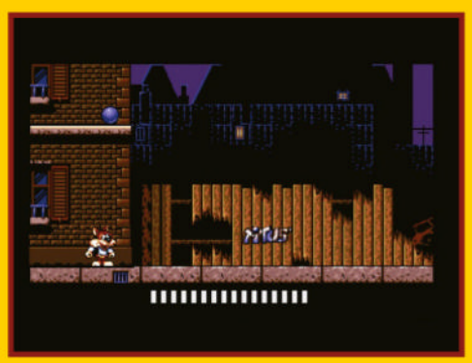
TITUS' FUR FLEW ACROSS A FEW PLATFORMS

PC

■ Despite being written from scratch, the game – either as *Lagaf'* or *Titus the Fox* – was still referred to as a successor to *The Blues Brothers*. Solid physics, secret rooms, more enemies and larger sprites set *Lagaf'/Titus* apart although the PC version has rather choppy scrolling.

AMIGA

■ Becoming one of the Amiga's finest platformers, this well-reviewed version was coded by Carlo Penconti using Francis Fournier's graphics. It boasts better, more fluid scrolling, some invincibility time when hit, and an option to slow the game's speed to make it a tad easier to play.

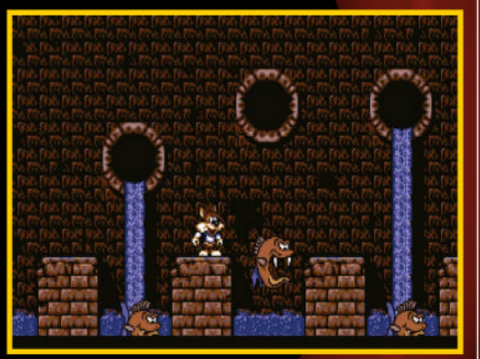


ATARI ST

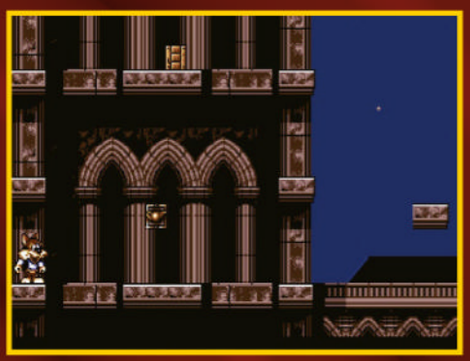
■ Practically identical to the Amiga version, the Atari ST has the same variety of levels and a similar amount of annoying disk-accessing time. But it does differ in one big regard: it's a flip-screen game rather than a scroller which does make it a little harder.

were trampolines and bouncing balls which could propel you to great heights when jumped upon and allow progress past parts that otherwise felt impenetrable. Eric says the aim of all of these additions was to give players a sense of freedom to explore and finish the levels in their own way. "The variety of objects was fun to create and use. It brought an innovative touch to the game," he says.

And yet there is no doubt the game was mightily difficult. Despite such aids, getting around the multi-directional scrolling levels – working from platform-to-platform and performing jumps across some 900 screens – posed a huge challenge for players. To beat the levels, you'd often need to think ahead as best you could, figuring how best to use your weaponised objects and quickly recover from mistakes. "Smart people could move objects and put them all in the same room," Eric says. Trouble is, if a player happened to collide with an enemy, the main character would invariably be flung back, sometimes into the path of danger which meant those three lives could soon be lost. Finishing felt like a true triumph.



» [PC] *Titus The Fox* was rather varied with many different obstacles to contend with in order to reach the end of each level.



» [PC] Seeing a lamp would be exciting because colliding with them would reveal a level code specially generated for your computer.

It didn't help that the scrolling felt a bit iffy on the PC version, putting players in a precarious position since it's not always possible to see what's coming until there's an abrupt movement that leaves little time to react. "The scrolling triggers when you reach the end of a map and continuous scrolling would have been unplayable – too choppy," Eric says by way of explanation.

To prevent constant replays, however, there was a password system but woe betide anyone who felt they could use them to cheat their way through the game. Although it was possible to find oil lamps which provided level codes, these were unique to each game installation. It meant a player couldn't use a level code found by a friend on their PC. "It changed depending on the hardware and you had to earn the code," Eric says, unrepentantly. "I was tired of seeing code lists in magazines."

"AT TITUS, THERE WAS NO ORGANISATION, NO WRITTEN DESIGN, NO PLANNING AND NO PROJECT MANAGER"
ERIC ZMIRO

This did have a knock-on effect, though. "The level difficulty was too hard for some players and they'd call us on the phone for help, so, for my next game, *Prehistorik 2*, I personally designed all of the levels with a different philosophy, having one short, hard way to finish a level and one longer, easier one," Eric says.

Despite misgivings over the difficulty, the game was well received. It sold well in France and external contractors were used to create the Amiga and Atari ST versions. The following year, the developers replaced the main character Moktar with a fox who happened to be Titus' mascot. This made perfect commercial sense and ensured the game was even more cutesy.

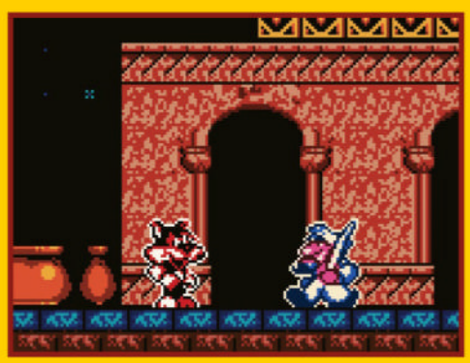
"*Lagaf'* was not well known abroad and Titus may not have had the rights for countries outside of France anyway," Eric says. It gave the developers a chance to make some tweaks to *Titus The Fox* such as a small number of objects being placed in different locations on the maps, additional sound effects, a recolouring of some dark-skinned enemies and the chopping of the final stage. The game was also opened up to a wider audience with versions released for the Amstrad CPC, Game Boy and Game Boy Color. With a soundtrack that was marginally more enjoyable than the source song, there's no doubting *Titus*' triumph. ✱

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The CPC was the only 8-bit computer to enjoy a version of Titus but while it looks spectacular – *Amstrad Action* gave the graphics 99% – there are fewer, shorter levels and it runs slower than its 16-bit counterparts. You can't throw enemies and there's no transport.

GAME BOY

■ The worst of all the conversions by some distance, the Game Boy port is incredibly slow and, having been stripped of some of its nicer flourishes (the ability to stack objects, for example), it simply feels more like a run-of-the-mill, hastily developed platformer.



GAME BOY COLOR

■ Released in 2000, there's not much difference between this version and the one for the Game Boy other than the fact the graphics are more colourful and you get a couple of extra stages. Riddled with bugs and feeling unfinished, it's one best left alone.

WonderSwan Color

» **MANUFACTURER:** Bandai » **YEAR:** 2000
» **COST:** ¥6,800 (launch), £70+ (today, boxed), £50+ (today, unboxed)

By the summer of 2000, the WonderSwan had achieved a good amount of success over almost a year-and-a-half on the market. The last console designed by the late Game Boy designer Gunpei Yokoi wasn't a threat to Nintendo's dominance in the handheld market, but its low price and recognisable games helped it secure a decent niche in Japan. So, just days after Nintendo officially revealed the Game Boy Advance, Bandai confirmed that the WonderSwan Color would arrive on the market by the end of the year.

Nintendo's new machine was unquestionably the more capable hardware, but the WonderSwan Color was ¥3,000 cheaper and launched with an updated remake of *Final Fantasy*. Though Bandai was able to bring popular anime licences such as *Gundam*, *One Piece* and *Hunter X Hunter* to the system, few third parties other than Square opted to work on the machine, and it remained a minority format. The WonderSwan Color's major flaw was that its non-backlit screen was badly affected by motion blur, so IPS screens are now popular with modders who seek out the system today.

WonderSwan Color fact

■ Of the 91 WonderSwan Color games, only 19 work on the original black-and-white hardware – the last of which was *Tetris*, released in April 2002.

PROCESSOR: 16-BIT NEC V30MZ CPU (3.072MHZ),
GRAPHICS: 224X144 RESOLUTION, 4,096 COLOURS AVAILABLE (UP TO 256 ON-SCREEN), TWO TILE MAPS, UP TO 128 SPRITES (32 PER LINE)
POWER: 1XAA BATTERY (UP TO 20 HOURS)
MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 16MB)
AUDIO: FOUR 4-BIT PCM CHANNELS
MEMORY: 64KB RAM

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ESSENTIAL GAME

Mr Driller

As great as *Mr Driller* was in the arcades and on home consoles, the game always felt like it would work brilliantly on handhelds, due to being simple to learn and highly compulsive. It proved to be just as good as you would hope, playing smoothly and looking absolutely fantastic thanks to its bold colours and distinctive design. Thanks to the console's long life off of a single AA battery, it also won't cost you the Earth to bring *Mr Driller* with you wherever you go, in case boredom strikes.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

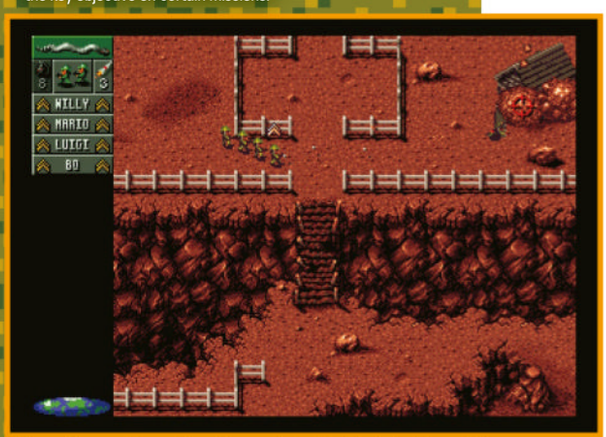
CANNON FODDER

BY BLENDING SIMPLE STRATEGY ACTION WITH WARTIME HUMOUR WORTHY OF BLACKADDER, SENSIBLE SOFTWARE CREATED A UNIQUE GAME THAT WON HEARTS AND MINDS ON THE AMIGA AND OTHER PLATFORMS. JOIN US AS WE REFLECT ON THE CELEBRATION AND CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING CANNON FODDER

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

» [Amiga] Placing crates of grenades next to wooden huts was a huge health-and-safety fail.

» [Amiga] Destroying all enemy buildings is the key objective on certain missions.



As you might gather from an opening screen that cautions, "This game is not in any way endorsed by the British Royal Legion," *Cannon Fodder* caused just a tiny bit of a stir in 1993. Sensible Software added the words as a legal disclaimer, following a minor media storm that saw politicians and tabloid newspapers denounce its use of the memorial poppy flower as "outrageous" and a "poppy game insult to our war dead". But we can only presume those complaining had spent little time playing or understanding the game. If they had done, they would have discovered an anti-war message about the futility of conflict, rather than anything disrespectful. You might feel that sentiment hitting home after progressing several levels with the same few squad members, whose names you have come to know well (and who you have perhaps levelled up from Private to Corporal or beyond) only to lose a troop permanently to a single shot. Their grave will then appear on a hillside shown between missions. Beyond the hill, new recruits shuffle forward to join your war effort; a seemingly endless conveyor belt of figures stretching far into the horizon as melancholy music plays.

Sensible even stated its feelings about real-life war in the manual for the game, advising players, "Don't try this at home, kids, because war is not a game – war, as *Cannon Fodder* demonstrates in its own quirky little way, is a senseless waste of human resources and lives. We hope that you never have to find out the hard way." Of course, no game by Sensible Software was ever going to adopt an entirely serious slant. For all that *Cannon Fodder* provided some genuinely thought-provoking moments, it was also just as chaotic, cheeky, colourful and fun as everyone expected from a new Sensible release in the early Nineties. The small development team, which included designer Jon Hare, artist Stoo Cambridge and programmer Jools Jameson, devised a wide range of level maps and parachuted in their trademark Sensible little pixel people, of the kind that had made their hits *Mega lo Mania* and *Sensible Soccer* so charming.

Cannon Fodder's audio really contributes to that charm too, which is instantly evident when you hear the catchy intro song with ironic lyrics called *War Has Never Been So Much Fun*. This title track was written by Jon Hare and recorded by the late Richard Joseph, whose excellent sound effects – from yells and grunts to explosions and ambient birdsong – add a great deal to *Cannon Fodder*'s atmosphere. The development team even filmed and starred in a comedic, *Monty Python*-meets-*Blackadder* music video for the song. You can watch the video in full on the Amiga CD32 and 3DO versions of the game.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSIONS OUTRANK THE REST?

AMIGA

■ Sensible Software was an Amiga developer at heart, and *Cannon Fodder* is remembered as a classic Amiga game above all else. A later Amiga CD32 version added graphical finesse, not to mention a few extra cheats to help anyone struggling to make progress.

ATARI ST

■ 'Basic' and 'stripped back' feel like the best descriptors of the Atari ST conversion. It's perfectly functional, but with no between-level screens, a limited colour palette and simple audio, it's hard to recommend loading this up today given the other ways to enjoy the game.

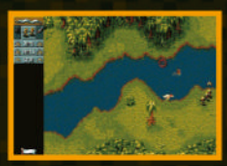
ACORN ARCHIMEDES

■ The Archimedes version stays true to the Amiga original, to the point where it's hard to distinguish much difference. There are just some small changes to the left-hand menu panel UI: the map button is text instead of a globe, and the colour scheme is different.

PC

■ The DOS port is slightly faster than the original, giving a frantic feel to the action and making some levels tougher by really testing your reflexes. The audio is stripped back but otherwise there's little to fault. This is the version currently available on GOG.

MEGA DRIVE

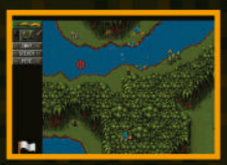


■ This fun console version is playable on the Codemasters cartridge for Evercade consoles (Codemasters acquired Sensible in 1999). The pixel-art graphics and sound don't shine as brightly as on the Amiga, but we can partly forgive that thanks to the quicker load times.

SNES

■ Instant loading times are also a big plus on the SNES port, which plays well and is similar to the Mega Drive game. We would argue that the sound is a bit weak, with the intro tune in particular sounding tinny compared with other versions.

3DO



■ Panasonic's 32-bit console proved a worthy platform for *Cannon Fodder*. The menu gives access to a FMV music video featuring the Sensible Software team, leading on to beautifully bright, vibrant graphics and fluid gameplay once you get into the action.

ATARI JAGUAR

■ Much like the 3DO game, the Jaguar port has wonderfully rich graphics and sharp sounds. 3D-rendered cartoon characters appear in a colourful intro, keeping things playful. It's worth noting that several users of the AtariAge forum have reported experiencing some bugs in this version.

GAME BOY COLOR

■ This handheld port is impressive. From a 3D-rendered game menu to digitised speech (well, screams of pain) and level design that is true to source, Codemasters did brilliantly here. The four megabyte cartridge helped, being twice the capacity of most Game Boy Color games.

» [Amiga] Things get gory on the brief opening level, set within a single screen.

"THE PUBLICITY PROVIDED US WITH A FANTASTIC AMOUNT OF COVERAGE"
STOO CAMBRIDGE

ARTIST Q&A

STOO CAMBRIDGE ON CRAFTING GRAPHICS FOR CANNON FODDER

How did you feel about taking the little pixel people from previous Sensible games and sending them off to war?
That's a good question, but despite appearances, there was no sharing of assets between any of our games unless it was either a sequel (*Cannon Fodder 2*) or a crossover (*Cannon Soccer*). So from the moment I started, everything was created from the ground up. The only real direction I took as to the size was, "It worked for *Mega lo Mania*, so we might as well start with similar sprites for *Cannon Fodder*." The first sprites I created were in all sorts of colours and I think they may have been a little bit bigger too.

Compared to those other games, there was more going on visually, from explosions to different environments. Was that a big challenge?
Yes, it was a lot of work to create something that flowed visually within the constraints of 16 colours at a 320x240/256 resolution. Admittedly, we used hardware sprites for the pointer, and the side panel was also made up of hardware sprites. Can you believe at one point that the side panel was draggable? You could move it about, but it became a hindrance, so the decision was made to lock it to the side. Another challenge was memory. Specifically, creating graphics that could be reused from level to level whilst taking on new colours, for say the dry desert style over the lushness of the jungle graphics.

How was it experiencing the minor media storm around the game?
I was far too tired and pretty damn exhausted to have really taken it all in to be honest. The publicity provided us with a fantastic amount of coverage, and those plonkers missing the anti-war message of the game just showed how ignorant they really were. You had to take a chance and buy the game and see for yourself what the message was. Thankfully people did and the very fact we're still talking about the game today, I don't think it worked out too bad.

What changed for *Cannon Fodder 2*?
I had nothing to do with any additional graphics added to make up the second game, as I was contracted to work on *Sensible Golf*. My graphics for the original were reused and in places formed the foundation for some of the new art that ended up going into the game. I didn't quite get the whole weird sci-fi thing, but those decisions were out of my control. Having said that, there's no bad feeling or discontent with my lack of involvement. Alas, *Sensible Golf* was signed to Virgin so had to be developed quickly, and I was committed to that instead.

"IT WAS A LOT OF WORK TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT FLOWED VISUALLY WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF 16 COLOURS"
STOO CAMBRIDGE

» [Amiga] Graves mount up between missions as you lose more and more troops.

Much like *Mega lo Mania*, *Cannon Fodder* is a strategy game of sorts. But then like *Sensible Soccer*, simplicity is what makes the experience so enjoyable. Use your cursor to move a small squad of troops around the map and fire at targets – that's pretty much it. Sure, you can separate your soldiers into smaller squads to divide and conquer. That is largely where a strategy element comes into play. Otherwise though, the gameplay is essentially about moving troops around and blowing things up, albeit in a wonderfully playable fashion.

The 24 missions are mostly broken down into several distinct phases, meaning there are in fact a whopping 72 levels set across jungle, arctic, desert, countryside and underground base environments. Most of these missions have a straightforward 'kill all enemies' objective, while some require you to destroy buildings, free hostages or protect civilians. In one

» [Amiga] Each mission is followed by a tribute to fallen troops.

» [Amiga] Get to the chopper! Frantic scenes on a hostage rescue mission.

» [Amiga] Countryside levels were reportedly inspired by *Emmerdale*, but we don't remember that show having tanks.

assignment worthy of the SAS, your goal is to kidnap an enemy leader. Each level feels distinctive and cleverly designed, with little surprises such as vehicles, civilians, animals and environmental hazards like quicksand adding diversity to the action.

Creating such a well-crafted game took a fair stretch of time in Nineties development terms. Work on *Cannon Fodder* started in 1991 but ran into difficulties when the planned publisher Mirrorsoft went bankrupt. Sensible eventually signed a deal with Virgin Interactive Entertainment in May 1993, by which time the game was almost ready; perhaps fortunately so, because those circumstances had granted Sensible complete independence from any expectations while it made the game to the beat of its own anarchic drum. Virgin published the Amiga version just in time for Christmas of 1993. Its success and popularity led to a spree of conversions that stretched into 1994 (Mega Drive and SNES), 1996 (Atari Jaguar and 3DO) and even 2000 (Game Boy Color).

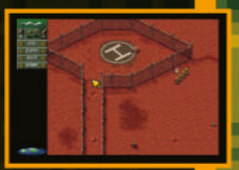
SURVIVING BOOT CAMP

USEFUL TACTICS TO HELP YOU TRIUMPH

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

■ Splitting troops into separate squads can work wonders in certain situations. Use this tactic to form a pincer movement around enemies and take them on from both sides. Your computer-controlled squads will stay alert, and fire on enemies, while you control the other troops.

STOCK UP

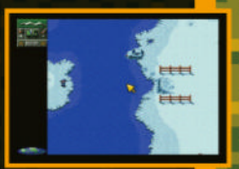


■ Gather grenades, bazookas and machine guns from crates wherever you see them. These explosives are essential on missions that revolve around destroying buildings. Just be careful to keep your soldiers well out of the blast radius, as friendly fire damage can happen all too easily.

TAKE COVER

■ Make use of your environment. Cliffs, buildings, walls and rocks offer great protection from damage and somewhere to shelter. When you break cover, avoid hesitation and start firing straight away. As the manual puts it, "Don't wait until you see the whites of their eyes."

USE VEHICLES



■ Jeeps, skimobiles, tanks and helicopters can be commandeered by your troops to great effect. Some levels are specifically designed around using vehicles, such as the Evil Knievel mission, which requires carefully implemented, death-defying jumps over rows of bushes in a skimobile.

PULL RANK

■ For every mission a soldier survives, they will progress from Private through to Corporal, right up to higher ranks including Captain and General. Advancing through the 16 ranks boosts things like their rate of fire, and even their gravestone when they eventually fall in battle.

TRICKY TERRAIN

HOW TO ADAPT TO EACH ENVIRONMENT

JUNGLE

The game begins in the lush green jungle, covered with trees and undergrowth. Watch out for carefully camouflaged enemies, as well as areas of quicksand which will quickly swallow up all your troops. Swimming across the large expanses of water can also leave you vulnerable.

ARCTIC

All those igloos, snowmen and cuddly seals might make you feel cosy for a moment, but slippery ice and enemy snipers will soon burst the bubble. Because there's relatively little cover to hide behind, picking enemies off from a distance with rockets is a good idea.

DESERT

Rather than the golden yellow sands of the Sahara, these deserts are a dusty orange type more reminiscent of the southwest USA. The first stage of this type is named The Grand Canyon. In further levels, gun-slinging civilians might just cause you problems.

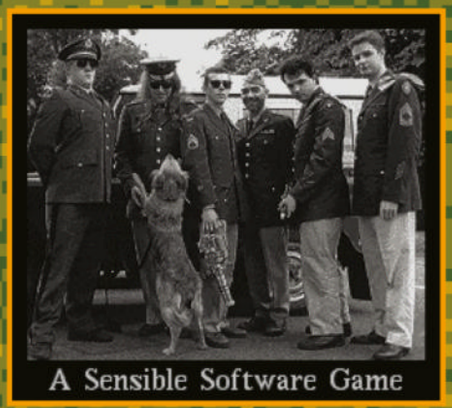
COUNTRYSIDE

Stoo Cambridge has previously named British soap opera Emmerdale as an inspiration for the countryside environments. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security by the peacefully grazing sheep and rustic country lanes; turrets and tanks await on those leafy green moorlands.

UNDERGROUND

The final levels of the game take place in the top-secret confines of an underground base, complete with dark and dingy sewers to trudge through, deadly turrets to sneak past and other nasty surprises. Taking cover behind walls and barricades is particularly important here.

» [Amiga] You'll often have to destroy buildings, so make sure you have suitable hardware.



» [Mega Drive] Hooray. You've fought off the opposing forces and got to the end with your soldiers intact.

"THE VERY FACT WE'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT THE GAME TODAY, I DON'T THINK IT WORKED OUT TOO BAD"
STOO CAMBRIDGE

The critical reception for the original Amiga release was unanimously glowing. It earned 94% in *Amiga Power* and *Amiga Format*, 93% in *CU Amiga* and *The One Amiga*, and nine out of ten in *Edge*. A memorable comment came from *Amiga Power* reviewer Cam Winstanley, who confessed, "Playing this game is now more important to me than eating, sleeping, or any other bodily function." The game garnered similar praise on other platforms, with *Next Generation* reviewing the Atari Jaguar game and declaring it, "The best Jaguar game ever. Period." Although *Cannon Fodder* was followed by two sequels, the legacy of those games has paled somewhat in comparison with the impact of the original.

If you wish to enjoy *Cannon Fodder* on a modern system, there are several options worth exploring. At the time of writing, you can buy the decent DOS version on GOG for a low price. If you have an Evercade console, you may be able to get hold of the (increasingly rare) Codemasters cartridge containing the Mega Drive version of the game. Subscription service Antstream Arcade is currently another way to play, while PC gamers might also want to check out *Open Fodder*: an open-source, fan-made recreation of the *Cannon Fodder* engine that includes a random level generator and a map editor. However you manage to load the game, you should find the colourful graphics, clever level design and pick-up-and-play gameplay hold up well.

If you make it through all 72 levels (which a press release for the game predicted would take around 50 hours) the final screen is a black-and-white photo of the Sensible team looking somewhere between sombre and sassy, dressed in army uniforms. While it might not be the most exciting outro sequence, it feels very in keeping with the spirit of the whole game: something smart and simple that reflects the character and humour of the designers. Years on, we know the team still looks back fondly on the game. When we asked Jon Hare to rank the Sensible games he was most proud of in *RG*237, while discussing the creation of *Mega lo Mania*, he placed *Cannon Fodder* and *Mega lo Mania* joint second, just behind *Sensible World Of Soccer*. Putting their own personalities into the heart of their games was a battle strategy that paid off royally for the Sensible team, and it's one we can only continue to salute, more than three decades after *Cannon Fodder* was launched.

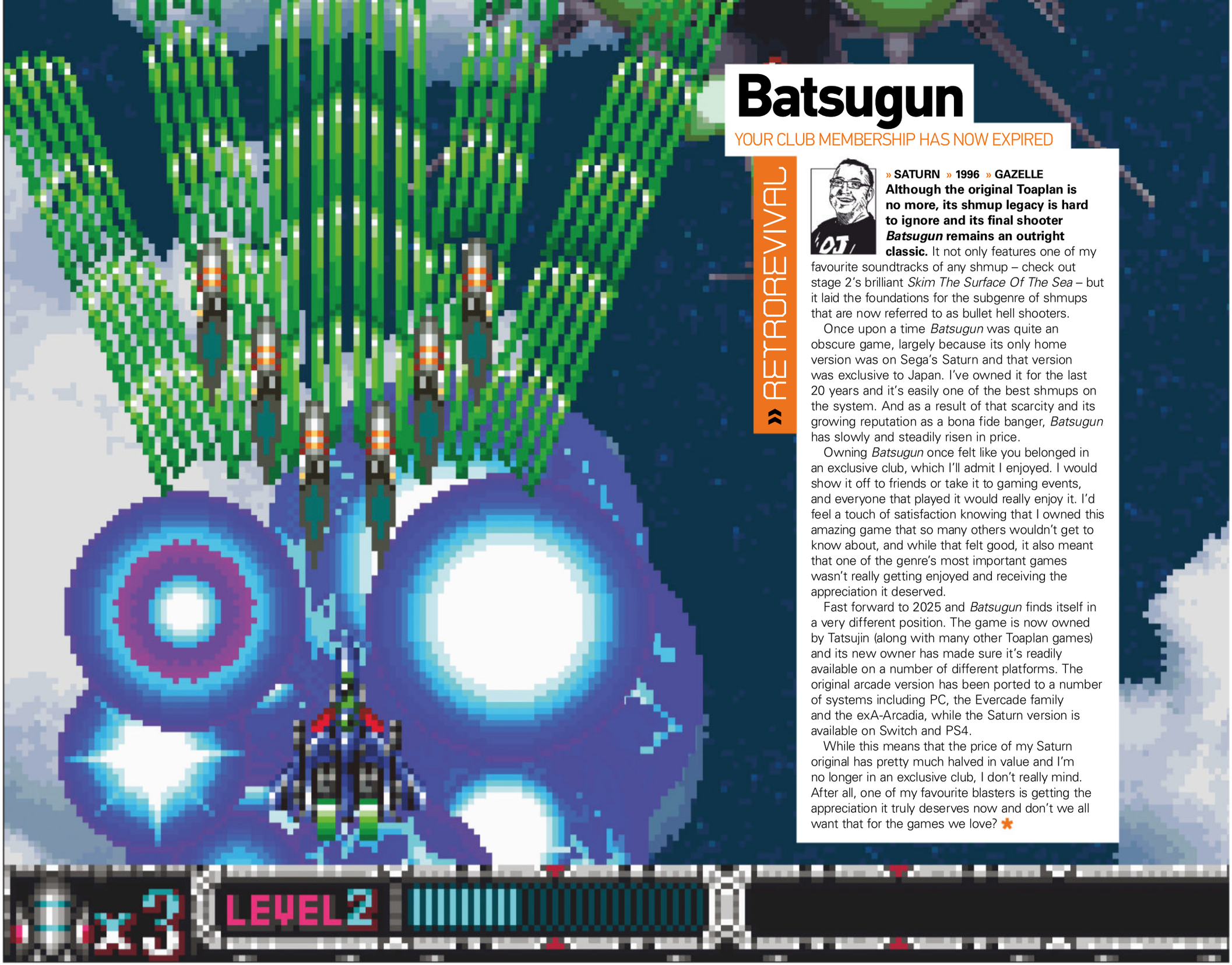
FURTHER FODDER

ARE THE SEQUELS CONSIDERED CANON?

There was less than a year between *Cannon Fodder* and *Cannon Fodder 2* (below). The Amiga and PC sequel retained the same gameplay, but added a new storyline set in space and involving time-travelling aliens. It was quite a thematic leap from the earthly stylings of the original.

Stoo Cambridge was not directly involved in making the second game, but he points out, "If you look at the last missions in *Cannon Fodder* they were very much hinting of something else to come, with the cryogenic pods, and very solid concrete construction within the bed rock. Though the first game only hinted at aliens and the paranormal, I think *Cannon Fodder 2* ran in that direction too hard and too fast as it just felt a bit out of character." While review scores were respectable, some critics and fans likened the game more to an expansion than a sequel.

A planned 3D follow-up for PlayStation 2 and PSP was abandoned some months into development. Then in 2011, Russian studio Burut CT made *Cannon Fodder 3* (top) after licensing the IP from Codemasters. The cartoon graphics were colourful, but the PC game received mixed reviews.



Batsugun

YOUR CLUB MEMBERSHIP HAS NOW EXPIRED

RETROREVIVAL

» SATURN » 1996 » GAZELLE

Although the original Toaplan is no more, its shmup legacy is hard to ignore and its final shooter *Batsugun* remains an outright classic. It not only features one of my favourite soundtracks of any shmup – check out stage 2's brilliant *Skim The Surface Of The Sea* – but it laid the foundations for the subgenre of shmups that are now referred to as bullet hell shooters.

Once upon a time *Batsugun* was quite an obscure game, largely because its only home version was on Sega's Saturn and that version was exclusive to Japan. I've owned it for the last 20 years and it's easily one of the best shmups on the system. And as a result of that scarcity and its growing reputation as a bona fide banger, *Batsugun* has slowly and steadily risen in price.

Owning *Batsugun* once felt like you belonged in an exclusive club, which I'll admit I enjoyed. I would show it off to friends or take it to gaming events, and everyone that played it would really enjoy it. I'd feel a touch of satisfaction knowing that I owned this amazing game that so many others wouldn't get to know about, and while that felt good, it also meant that one of the genre's most important games wasn't really getting enjoyed and receiving the appreciation it deserved.

Fast forward to 2025 and *Batsugun* finds itself in a very different position. The game is now owned by Tatsujin (along with many other Toaplan games) and its new owner has made sure it's readily available on a number of different platforms. The original arcade version has been ported to a number of systems including PC, the Evercade family and the exA-Arcadia, while the Saturn version is available on Switch and PS4.

While this means that the price of my Saturn original has pretty much halved in value and I'm no longer in an exclusive club, I don't really mind. After all, one of my favourite blasters is getting the appreciation it truly deserves now and don't we all want that for the games we love? ✱

PINBALL UNDERGROUND

THE OFFICIAL (AND UNOFFICIAL) EXPLOSION OF VIRTUAL PINBALL

WHILE THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR OF EIGHTIES ARCADES MADE PINBALL AN ICON OF ANALOGUE GAMING, THE EXISTENCE OF THE ONCE-POPULAR TABLETOP GAME STARTED FAR BEFORE THEN. PINBALL CAN BE DATED BACK TO 1600S FRANCE, WHERE BILLIARDS TABLES FILLED WITH PINS WERE HIT WITH SPRING-LAUNCHED BALLS, BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL THE COIN-OPERATED MACHINES OF THE THIRTIES THAT THEY BECAME POPULAR

WORDS BY LEWIS WHITE

» [Apple II] One of the earliest digital pinball games was Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set*.

» [Amiga] *Pinball Fantasies* was a superb sequel to *Pinball Dreams* by the studio now known as DICE.

Decades separated from the explosion of pinball in the Seventies and Eighties, a rather short-lived explosion as it was, pinball is seeing an underground resurgence. While new physical pinball tables exist, such as Stern's infamously fantastic 2021 *Godzilla* machine, the particularly expensive hobby has taken a shift from the physical realm to the digital one.

Digital pinball games certainly aren't new of course – Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set* launched in 1982, while *Pinball Dreams* lit up Amigas in the early Nineties and led to several sequels. Numerous pinball games also turned up on consoles, including the 1984 release of *Pinball* on the NES and more ambitious offerings like the *Crush* series, which made its debut on the PC Engine. As technology evolved so too did the tables, leading to the likes of the *Pro Pinball* series and Microsoft *Pinball Arcade*, which emulated classic pinball tables of old.

> "WHEN WE'RE REMAKING THE PLAYFIELD TEXTURES OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, WE DO THAT ALL MANUALLY... WILLIAMS DON'T SEND US THE FILE WITH PLAYFIELD.CD"
> **THOMAS CROFTS**

Nowadays, technology has gotten to a point where the exacting physics of real-life tables can be accurately replicated. Add in the fact that classic tables are now extremely expensive and it should come as no surprise that digital versions are becoming more and more popular. Most modern gamers are aware of the existence of Zen Studios' take on recreating the physical tabletop games. Since 2007's *Pinball FX*, the Hungarian studio has mostly spent the last decade-and-a-half creating digital versions of the game across multiple generations of consoles, starting with the Xbox Live Arcade service and continuing up until the Series S and Series X.

In 2007, *Pinball FX* was the first foray into HD pinball, offering players new, unique tables that had no basis in real-life machines. Launching with *Speed Machine*, *Extreme* and *Agents*, this first entry would create additional tables based on established IP, including *Street Fighter II* and *Rocky And Bullwinkle*. As Zen Studios grew, more original licensed tables could be created, including tables based on *Doom*, *Fallout*, *Plants Vs Zombies*, *Family Guy*, *Portal* and many, many more.

Creating an original pinball table is hard work, very hard work. For developers, each table is its own game with its own mechanics, the only limitation being the need to include a ball, flippers and the expected multiball, everything else is unique. Zen Studios senior pinball table

» [Mega Drive] *Devil Crash MD* provided the sort of digital mayhem that just wasn't possible on a traditional table.

designer Thomas Crofts, who joined the team in 2011, explains that everything starts with a strong theme, a hook for your players and then imagination takes over. "A lot of it revolves around the theme of the table," Thomas explains. "So, in the case of *Super League Football*, obviously it's two teams playing football. I designed the overview of the game modes – what I want to happen, when you launch the ball, the layout… where to put the ramps, where you put the bumpers, the slingshots. That's also dependent on the theme."

A lot of Zen's takes on pinball succeed because it distanced itself from the limitations of physical tables. The aforementioned *Fallout* table managed to include an RPG experience with players building up their SPECIAL stats and entering shops to buy stimpacks; the *Doom* table is a rapid frenzy of smashing balls to close portals while alarms blare and combos rack up into the millions. "Some tables we do, you know, try to push the realism," Thomas tells us. "You know, feasibly recreate [most of] it in a real-life table, whereas I think some of the older ones, particularly, like, *Marvel* and *Star Wars*, we try to be less realistic on those and more fantastical and magical."

For Zen Studios, the limitation of what a physical table can actually do isn't usually a restriction – there's a revelry in seeing what you can do when tethered from the real world's high maintenance needs and terrifying failure rates on some of the more complicated machines. Distanced from reality's needs, *Portal* can have working portals, the *Deadpool* table sees the Merc With A Mouth teleport around and make balls float in the air – it's intense.

For every table that breaks the rules of physics, Zen also has a recreation of a real-world machine. Partnering with the likes of Williams, classic tables such as the amazing 1993 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* or *Indiana Jones: The Pinball Adventure* from the same year are available to play in high resolutions with realistic physics. For

ZEN STUDIOS FIELD TRIP

HOW THE STUDIO RESEARCHES PINBALL

As a studio dedicated to bringing pinball to modern audiences in as easy a form as possible, Zen Studios makes sure everyone involved can learn everything possible about the game. When recreating an old table, Zen makes sure to bring in a real machine, letting developers open them up in order to see how they work. This hands-on approach to the original table has led to some exceptionally good recreations that feel as authentic as a digital experience can.

Additionally, as a studio based in Hungary, the developer has easy access to Flippermúzeum, a dedicated pinball museum that displays over 140 tables from various periods of the game's illustrious history. When senior pinball table designer Thomas Crofts joined Zen in 2011, the museum proved invaluable for research as "nothing is more invaluable than seeing the real machine".

While not all developers at Zen are devout pinball enthusiasts, there remains a healthy respect for the craft. After all, if you're looking to create your own tables, you need to experience the greats. It's like writing for a gaming magazine without reading **Retro Gamer**.

» The Flippermúzeum has proven to be a tremendous resource for Zen Studios. You can find more information at flippermuzeum.hu

» [PC] In addition to recreating real-life tables to make them look as authentic as possible, Zen also adds its own tweaks to make them look more like its own tables. You can see the differences in these two shots; Zen's updated table is on the right.

MOST REQUESTED

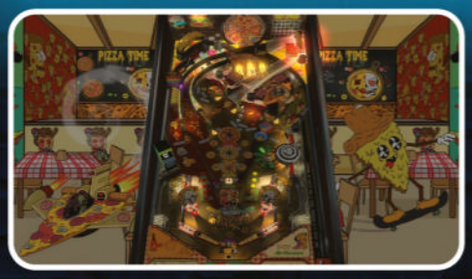
THE BEST TABLES FOR VISUAL PINBALL

FUTURAMA

This is a wholly original table inspired by Matt Groening's hit animated series. Created by Whizkid, this table is a love letter to the series and manages to create an amazing loop of references to play through.

DR WHO

Last re-released in 2016, this original version is everything retro gamers love about *Doctor Who*. With voice acting from Sylvester McCoy, you'll fight Daleks, travel through time and summon seven versions of the Doctor to help you.



PIZZA TIME

Created by homebrew developer Goldchinno, *Pizza Time* is a pain to get running properly, but when it does run, it's amazing. Released in 2020, this is an intensive table that uses everything Visual Pinball has to offer.

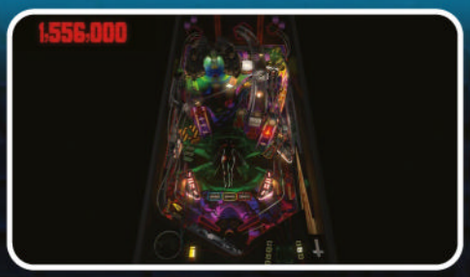
» [PC] Farsight Studios' *The Pinball Arcade* recreates tables from the likes of Gottlieb and Stern. This is *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*.

» [PC] Zen Studios' recreation of *The Twilight Zone*, hides animated portals behind the iconic door, lighting strikes and more.

» [PC] *Stern Pinball Arcade* includes 11 iconic pinball tables, such as *Ghostbusters*. It's another great release from Farsight and has a physical Switch version.

» [PC] Making a table in Visual Pinball is an intensive ordeal with multiple layers, logic code and much more to keep track of. Every table is easily editable.

» [PC] Stern's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* table crams everything players love about the series into one table including ship battles, planet scanning and more.



BLOOD MACHINES

Released in 2022, *Blood Machines* is the first release from VpinWorkshop. Created in collaboration with the team behind the movie the table is a feast for the eyes and ears if you pay for the soundtrack.

GODZILLA 2021

This is a recreation of Stern's popular *Godzilla 2021* pinball table, albeit powered by the ROM of the Sega machine from the Nineties. It's a mishmash of what fans love of the new machine while bringing back elements of the older table.

» [PC] Bally's amazing *Dr Who* table is an often forgotten hidden gem. Catching two balls in the Time Extender allows you to select Doctors to bring into the game as bonuses, including multiball and score multipliers.

Zen, remaking those tables is almost as much work as designing an original machine after negotiating for rights, recreating decades-old artwork and making sure everything plays as fans expect. "Most of the work we do is from scratch ourselves," Thomas explains as many original pieces of artwork are lost to the ether decades after their original releases. "When we're remaking the playfield textures or something like that, we do that all manually... Williams don't send us the file with playfield.cd."

> "I LIKE TO IMAGINE TABLES THAT NEVER EXISTED AND THEN BUILD THEM. THIS IS MUCH MORE WORK THAN RECREATING A TABLE THAT EXISTS"
> WHIZKID

There can also be issues with what players expect when playing a classic table in a virtual form. Many of the most popular tables actually have multiple versions which were sold at different prices when they were released. For example, Bally's 1992 *The Addams Family* table could be found without a physical figurine to hit for Cousin It, and other tables have even bigger differences. For Zen, being able to remake physical tables with all the bells and whistles for a tenner instead of ten grand – if not more – is part of the charm of recreating tables in the first place.

Of course, Zen Studios isn't the only developer that specialises in creating recreations of classic pinball games, as Farsight Studios is also worthy of mentioning. It originally came to the attention of pinball fans in 2004 with *Pinball Hall Of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection*, which appeared on a variety of systems, including the PS2, Wii, Xbox and PSP, and the *Pinball Hall Of Fame: The Williams Collection*. Nowadays it's better known for its *The Pinball Arcade* series, which started in 2012 and currently covers tables from Gottlieb and Stern (it lost the rights to Bally and Williams tables in 2018, which was subsequently picked up by Zen Studios). The company is famed for its accurate recreations of classic tables, something it has been perfecting now for two decades and this accuracy has only improved as more cutting-edge hardware has led to more realistic physics in its releases.

While Zen Studios currently dominates the official land of virtual pinball, the last two decades have seen an indie movement slowly building behind the scenes before exploding in the past couple of years. Similar to the world of 3D printing, gamers spent years creating their own virtual pinball tables with full HD screens, haptic feedback and surround-sound speakers. Now, official machines exist and games like Zen Studios' *Pinball FX* even support being played on machines with proper backglass support and portrait screen support.

While hardware is always interesting, it has to be served by software, and the virtual pinball community has spent years creating and designing their own open-source software to play their own original tables or even recreations of classic machines. Powered by the long-running-but-still-updated PinMAME emulator, the open-source Visual Pinball software is the program of choice for thousands of fans.

Allowing players to create and play tables in one program, Visual Pinball was initially designed by developer Randy Davis who released the software in 2000. A decade later, in 2010, Davis made the software open source under a freeware licence, prohibiting anyone from charging for the program, and dozens of fans have since worked on newer versions of the software.

» [PC] Every modern pinball game is based around completing missions. For example, *Indiana Jones: The Pinball Adventure* allows you to save Marion from danger.

Carsten Wächter, ex-senior graphics software engineer and current engineering manager at Nvidia, has spent years working on Visual Pinball and the PinMAME emulator under the name Toxie. After falling in love with pinball in Nineties arcades, Carsten became aware of the underground virtual pinball scene after starting university and desperately wanted to help.

"As the pinball industry kinda completely died around 1999, so did the machines slowly vanish from public places, and were either replaced by arcade machines or most of the time, even worse, slot machines in German pubs," Carsten tells us. "During my university time, at some point I read about the PinMAME project on some emulation site and followed their progress... it was fascinating to follow the dev teams' progress during that phase, especially as soon as Visual Pinball came along."

As soon as PinMAME became open for all in 2008, quickly followed by Visual

» [PC] With working portals, Zen's take on this amazing videogame could be faked in a real table, but the fantasy of video pinball means you don't have to make it physically possible anymore.

» [PC] Zen Studios' pinball games have one huge advantage – they actually teach you how each table works.

» [PC] *Infinity Gauntlet* is an adaptation of the comic book storyline and it takes full advantage of its videogame form.

PINBALL RIFFS

THERE ARE PLENTY OF GREAT GAMES OUT THERE WITH A PINBALL SLANT

Outside of Zen Studios and Visual Pinball developers, there's a host of new pinball-inspired experiences that have been released on modern platforms. *Yoku's Island Express*, developed by Villa Gorilla in 2018, is a sprawling Metroidvania designed around pinball. Have you ever imagined an open-world pinball game? Well, here it is and it's rather great fun. *Demon's Tilt*, released in 2019 and developed by WIZNWAR and FLARB LLC, is an epic combination designed to push "the limits of the Video Pinball genre". Combining the ball-and-flippers mechanics with SHMUP gameplay and even hack-and-slash elements, *Demon's Tilt* shows that pinball doesn't have to be traditional to be amazing. In late-2024, an amazing sequel was released as well, *Xenotilt*, which cranked everything up to 11. *Creature In The Well* is a hack-and-slash with pinball elements, while *Pinball Spire* is another enjoyable title with Metroidvania elements.

» [PC] It's a short experience, but *Yoku's Island Express* is a lot of fun while it lasts.

» [PC] *Xenotilt: Hostile Pinball Action* is the most hectic game of video pinball ever made, filling the screen with superfluous effects with every hit of the ball.

Pinball, Carsten jumped onboard. Armed with a PhD in computer science and a career in graphics software engineering, the talented developer became one of the main contributors to the project. "Most of the original developers that started the project left [both PinMAME and Visual Pinball]," he says. "So I was the main contributor for a long time. Fortunately, a lot more people joined the project over time, and so in the last ten years there were more developers joining again."

Despite being open source and having to be free, the homebrew virtual pinball community is still niche. Getting a single table running on a tool like Visual Pinball requires a fair amount of setup. At its basic level, players need to grab their ROMs, a visual table recreation made by a fan and, if they're running a more complex table, a separate PUP Pack setup for video files and the like.

This complexity has always been the crippling blow to the virtual pinball community. For many, it's too complicated and even as fans create all-in-one installer programs, there's still a lot of space for simple things to break. As Visual Pinball, PinMAME and its satellite programs have matured, increasing this simplicity has become the new focus. "In [Visual Pinball] Standalone we've been kind of like building all these features in," explains contributor Jason Millard. "We slowly ported B2S from Visual Basic, it's a Visual Basic program

» [PC] *Creature From The Black Lagoon* celebrates the Universal movie monster.

» [PC] After Farside Studios licence ran out, Zen Studios now recreates classic Williams tables like *Funhouse*.

actually and we ported that to C++, PUP is closed-source so we reverse-engineered it... so you don't really have to download and set up anything. I'd like to see it just be easier for people to download and get things running," Jason continues. Right now, downloading a table made for the VR version of Visual Pinball means it's only actually fully functional in the VR version of the app, despite having all of the same files needed for the flatscreen version. "It would be nice to have everything all integrated into one file... if the community could come together and try to solve some of that... it would be nice," Jason says.

Visual Pinball's biggest supporters aren't just the hardworking developers of its constantly evolving codebase, but also the hundreds of independent creators making maps for the software. Alongside wholly original creations, many fans work on recreating classic tables that are emulated by PinMAME.

While the legality of recreating is still as grey as with any form of emulation, Visual Pinball developers are proud of their preservation of classic tables. With collectors dumping old ROMs that haven't been re-released in decades, essentially becoming abandonware, Visual Pinball is the only place where these tables still exist. "This is one of the main driving forces," Carsten explains. "Most pinball companies either vanished or refocussed, or it would be extremely complicated for them to recreate all kinds of these old machines (due to licensing issues, etc). Of course, there are commercial offerings like *Pinball FX*, they're doing a really great job, but they will still never be able (both financially and time-wise) to preserve the bulk of machines that existed."

> "MOST PINBALL COMPANIES EITHER VANISHED OR REFOCUSED, OR IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY COMPLICATED FOR THEM TO RECREATE ALL KINDS OF THESE OLD MACHINES"
> CARSTEN WACHTER

Alongside bringing back tables from the Fifties to the modern day, countless original tables also exist. From completely original ideas to tables based on *Shovel Knight* to an amazingly complex table based on *Futurama*, creators are always working on new experiences for players to spend hours on. "Making virtual pinball tables is my outlet for creativity," expert map creator Whizkid told us. "Most of the work of Visual Pinball creators involve recreating existing tables, but I like to imagine tables that never existed and then build them. This is much more work than recreating a table that exists. In a recreation, you can emulate the ROM of the actual game which handles all the game logic. You have to build that game logic by hand when creating something original, but I enjoy that challenge."

Creators like Whizkid that aim to create their own tables spend countless hours working on game logic, modelling unique systems and linking together the complex hordes of unconnected homebrew tools to create their own tables. It's hard work, and setting up some of these tables to play is hard work as well, but when everything comes together, the community manages to create tables that rival even the best official machines on the market.

For example, Whizkid's *Secret Agent*, a completely original table not based on any established IP, has its own theme based on the vibe of a Saturday morning cartoon. While many people outside of the genre may not realise it, pinball tables do manage to tell stories through their gameplay, and the most talented map makers are still creating their own tales.

» [PC] While this looks like Stern's 2021 *Godzilla* table, fans have managed to mostly recreate it while basing their recreation on ROMs of Sega's long-forgotten 1998 machine based on the awful Roland Emmerich movie.

» [PC] Zen Studios has tables based on a huge number of popular franchises, from *American Dad* and *Jaws* to *Star Wars* pictured here.

"Pinball tables such as *Indiana Jones* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1993 integrated the stories of their source material in a way that made you feel you played out a story instead of just batting a ball around," Whizkid explains. "I also aspire to have a sense of a story in the games I create. With virtual pinball, one can gather a hoard of hundreds of tables, and only have time for a few games on each table. I still want to make pinball that has more to see and do than what you will experience in a few games."

Virtual pinball is obviously bigger, and far more complex, than ever before, but there's always an entry point. For those who want an easy way to play new tables, the tables by Zen Studios and Farsight Studios are as click-and-go as games get. However, for those who want to kit out a full virtual pinball table with haptic feedback, surround sound speakers and a host of unique tables or classic recreations, there's a beautiful and dedicated homebrew team for that. It just takes a lot of learning and patience. ✱

PARKING GARAGE RALLY CIRCUIT

» [PC] Thankfully, the boulder doesn't demolish the car park – but it might wreck your race.

» [PC] Real-world features like spiral ramps add to the variety in the courses.

» [PC] Jumping between the towers in Chicago is one of the game's coolest setpieces.

» [PC] Drifting is visually pleasing and key to getting the best lap times.

IN THE KNOW

» **DEVELOPER:** WALABER ENTERTAINMENT
» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
» **PLATFORM:** PC
» **GENRE:** RACING

YOUR LOCAL MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK MIGHT NOT SEEM LIKE A NATURAL RACING VENUE, BUT TIM FITZRANDOLPH HAS MANAGED TO FIND THE FUN IN THE BASTIONS OF BRUTALISM. WE SPEAK TO HIM TO FIND OUT HOW HE PUT TOGETHER HIS ENJOYABLE INDIE RACER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

Once of the things that we love about videogames is their ability to uncover the potential for fun in mundane, everyday situations. Defending the planet from alien invaders is clearly going to be an exciting prospect, but the acts of delivering newspapers and driving taxis are less obvious in their appeal – yet *Paperboy* and *Crazy Taxi* made classics of both jobs. In that spirit, *Parking Garage Rally Circuit* combines the typically tedious affair of navigating multi-storey car parks with the thrills of arcade racing.

"The game was originally an entry for Ludum Dare 54, which had the theme 'Limited Space,'" says Tim FitzRandolph, the indie developer behind the game. "I was trying to think of an activity that usually requires a lot of space that could be interesting in a smaller space. The idea of shrinking a race course down into a parking garage came to mind. The multiple floors with tight turns (drifting!) and ramps (jumps!) immediately made me think of rally racing, and the concept was born," he explains. "I liked the game jam version so much I decided to turn it into a full release."

We'll be honest – when we first saw the title *Parking Garage Rally Circuit*, we were rather concerned as to how the game would find sufficiently different ways to present the concept of big, concrete car parks. "Honestly I was worried about this as well. Mostly I tried to make sure that each track has one unique element not found in the other tracks," Tim admits. "I also tried to make each track set in a landmark location across the United States, so real-world locations provided inspiration in many cases, such as the obvious example of the Marina City towers in Chicago, which simply *had* to be jumped between."

One way in which Tim has helped to differentiate the tracks from one another is to include some mid-race events, such as a lightning storm that blows out the garage's electrics and forces you to rely on your headlights. "This was actually a suggestion I received during one of my live game development streams, to give the game a

» [PC] Gold, silver and bronze ghosts offer competition in the single-player mode.

» [PC] The Saturn influence is visible in the mesh effect used for this transparent road.

stronger arcade feeling," he recalls. The game's drifting model is reminiscent of kart racing games – activated with a single button press, and used to gain a turbo boost. "I started the game knowing that it would focus on drifting, which indeed fits the tight spaces of the setting," Tim tells us. "I also tuned the drift mechanic intentionally to suit tight spaces: while drifting you actually slow down slightly (to allow tight cornering), but then get a boost of speed as you exit the drift and shoot down the straight. Later to allow for more skill and 'edge of your seat' moments, I decided to let the drift boosts stack infinitely, allowing higher and higher top speeds for advanced players."

» [PC] Weather conditions are a key component of rally racing, even in parking garages.

One unusual aspect of the game compared to other arcade racers is that you only race against CPU ghosts in single-player mode. "That came naturally from the rally inspiration, which is usually individual cars racing against the clock. It also suited the tight spaces well, because contact racing with other cars in the tiny parking garages would likely be pretty frustrating," Tim explains. However, in multiplayer it's possible to turn on collisions with other racers.

An aspect of the game that has drawn a lot of praise is its ska soundtrack. "The arcade style of the game reminded me a lot of Sega's AM2 arcade games with their bright blue skies and high-energy music," Tim tells us. "Being a child of the Nineties I also love ska music, and so I took a chance and reached out to The Holophonics to see if they would be interested in letting me use a few of their songs for the game. To my surprise, they offered to collaborate on a full original soundtrack for the game! It adds so much to the game, I'm really, really happy with how it turned out."

We really enjoyed *Parking Garage Rally Circuit*, giving it 80% in issue 264, and since then it has been updated to include split-screen local multiplayer. "I would love to make a version of *PGRC* that runs on an actual Saturn, and from my research I think it should be possible," Tim enthuses. "I've publicly stated that if the game sells 100,000 units or more, I can financially justify spending the time to make a proper Saturn version, so hopefully that will happen!" If that's something you're interested in, the game is available on Steam now.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET

How Tim drew visual inspiration from the Sega Saturn

The Saturn didn't meet Sega's commercial hopes but has earned a great deal of fans in the years since its demise, and Tim counts among them. "I never owned a Saturn during its original run, when I was in high school, instead I had an N64. The Saturn always had a sort of enigmatic quality to it (like the 3DO), as I didn't know anyone who had one at the time, but I knew about some Saturn exclusive games like *NiGHTS* and of course Sega first-party arcade ports," he admits. "Later in life I bought a Saturn and fell in love with *Burning Rangers*, the somewhat forgotten Sonic Team 3D platforming/shooting masterpiece that for some reason never got a sequel.

"When working on *Parking Garage Rally Circuit* I did some research on the specific quirks of the Saturn – resolution, issues with transparency, dithering techniques – and tried to emulate them faithfully in my game, including recreating the Action Replay interface for the game's settings menu." You can even see the influence in the name of the fictional console the game runs on, the Walaber Pluto.

So what does Tim see as the Saturn's key visual quirks? "Although Saturn and PlayStation share a lot of similarities – low resolution, unfiltered textures, vertex 'wobble' that results from lower precision, vertex-based lighting – there are a few traits that make a game specifically look like a Saturn game in my mind," he says. "Firstly, avoiding transparency/translucent objects, and preferring to use a dither/mesh effect instead. Car shadows and dirt/smoke particles in my game use this. Secondly, less warping/distorting of textures near the edge of the screen than PlayStation games, due to the Saturn using sprites (quads) instead of triangles, and many games using VDP2 sprite scaling and tiling techniques for the ground surfaces."

» [PC] The Walaber Pluto is a console that doesn't exist, but the inspiration is clear.

» [PC] Keen Saturn importers may well be familiar with this Action Replay-style menu.

STUART WHYTE

As a seasoned producer and gaming executive at renowned companies such as MicroProse, Bullfrog, Lionhead and Supermassive Games, Stuart Whyte had led many development teams to create a host of well-known, cutting-edge titles

Words by David Crookes

Stuart Whyte has worked on some of the most iconic games for more than 30 years, enjoying a highly successful career as a project manager, producer and studio head. A keen fan of text adventure games as a youngster, he spent more than four years writing for *Amstrad Action* before starting work at MicroProse. He would later move to Bullfrog, work for Electronics Arts and have two highly productive spells with Lionhead Studios/Microsoft Game Studios. A long-standing board member of industry body TIGA, Stuart also worked for a promising start-up, created his own company and oversaw many big titles for PlayStation London Studio.

» Stuart Whyte had a ZX81 when he was growing up, as pictured here around 1983.

How did you get into computing, Stuart?
When I was around the age of eight or nine, a neighbour across the road built his own computer and I remember playing a couple of very basic games on it. My dad, a lecturer at UMIST in Manchester, also introduced me to computers at his work but the first computer I really spent time with was a Sinclair ZX81 which I got in 1982 for passing my 11+ exams.

When did you begin to take an interest in game development?
I loved my ZX81 and upgraded it over time with a 16K RAM pack, a sound card and a 'proper' keyboard. I spent many hours typing in program listings from magazines like *Your Sinclair* and taught myself BASIC programming. Around 1985 to 1986, I upgraded to an Amstrad CPC 464 and as well as writing some games in BASIC, I experimented with tools like the Graphic Adventure Creator and the Professional Adventure Writer. However, nothing I created was good enough to release!

What kinds of games did you enjoy?
I enjoyed games like *3D Monster Maze* and *Mazogs*. I also enjoyed text adventures such as *Ship Of Doom* and *Inca Curse* though the limited parsers on the ZX81 often made them frustrating. By the time I'd upgraded to my Amstrad I was a voracious gamer. I'd head down to Altrincham market every Saturday and buy a new game with my pocket money. My first text adventure on the CPC, *Souls Of Darkon*, had graphics and a more sophisticated parser which felt like a massive leap forward compared to the adventure games I'd played previously on the ZX81! I also really got into the Infocom text adventures on the CPC with *Lurking Horror* probably my favourite but I remember discovering *Laser Squad* for the first time and playing it over and over again.

How did you land the job of project manager at MicroProse?
After graduating with a degree in computers and management, I knew I didn't want to work in traditional tech jobs like banking or database programming. Instead, I took a job at a local pub, the Haddon Hall, and spent my free time playing games on the 486SX-25 MHz PC I'd bought during my final year at university. Some of my favourites included *Ultima Underworld*, *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Wing Commander*. One day, a friend spotted an ad in the local Leeds newspaper for an office manager position at MicroProse. The only detail that stood out was "knowledge of videogames a plus".

What happened next?
Having played a few MicroProse games, I figured, "Why not?" and applied despite having no clue what an office manager actually did. I was soon invited for what was likely my first-ever job interview. It became apparent that the role was far more significant than I'd anticipated: they were hiring someone to lead a new 30-person games studio in Leeds, a satellite studio to their headquarters in Chipping Sodbury, Bristol. Realising I was out of my depth, I relaxed during the interview – after all, it seemed unlikely they'd hire someone with no prior experience for such a role. Unsurprisingly, I didn't get the job but they promised to keep my details on file and about four months later, they got back in touch and offered me a position as a project manager at the MicroProse headquarters. I was thrilled to accept.

What was it like there?
I vividly remember my first day. The

> I spent a lot of time traveling to meet developers – armed with a Ford Mondeo company car and a 'brick' of a car phone
>
> Stuart Whyte

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **F-15 STRIKE EAGLE** [1993] GAME GEAR
- **TINHEAD** [1993] MEGA DRIVE
- **IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 2025** [1994] AMIGA
- **PIRATES! GOLD** [1994] AMIGA CD32
- **X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP** [1995] PLAYSTATION
- **POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING** [1998] WINDOWS
- **SIMCOASTER** [2001] WINDOWS
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS** [2002] GAMECUBE, XBOX, GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF ARKABAN** [2004] WINDOWS, GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **BLACK & WHITE 2** [2005] WINDOWS
- **THE MOVIES** [2005] WINDOWS
- **FABLE II** [2008] XBOX 360
- **FABLE III** [2010] XBOX 260
- **DOCTOR WHO: THE ETERNITY CLOCK** [2012] PLAYSTATION 3, WINDOWS, MAC, VITA
- **FABLE LEGENDS** [2016] WINDOWS, XBOX ONE (CANCELLED)
- **BLOOD & TRUTH** [2019] PSVR

» [PC] *X-COM: Terror From The Deep* was one of several X-COM titles that Stuart produced at MicroProse.

» [PC] Stuart was head of production when work began on *The Movies* at Lionhead.

» While at MicroProse, Stuart worked on *Boo!* for the SNES, Mega Drive and Amiga but it was never released.

PILGRIM
The winners of the Adventurer of '89 are announced...
Pilgrim Adventurer of the Year 1989
And the winner, Ladies and Gentlemen, is...

» Stuart won a visit to Magnetic Scrolls when he was named the first Amstrad Adventurer Of The Year. But the company went into administration shortly afterwards.

company had arranged for me to stay at a guest house near the office for the first few months. The night before I started, I discovered that a group of colleagues from the US office was also staying there. They invited me to watch the Super Bowl with them, which turned into a late and rather boozy night. Let's just say my first morning on the job was a little rough!

What did you do while you worked there?
The role was in MicroProse's console-games division. Historically, the company had focussed on PC games and even dabbled in arcades, but unlike competitors like EA, they were late to the console market. My team, consisting of about six internal members, was working on titles like *F-15 Strike Eagle 2* and *Tinhead* when I joined. Over time, my responsibilities expanded, and at one point, I was project managing around nine different game projects across the SNES and Mega Drive platforms. Some of these were developed in-house, but many were outsourced to small indie teams – often just one or two developers – creating new games.

Why did you leave MicroProse in 1993?
I thoroughly enjoyed my time at MicroProse,

» [Mega Drive] The enjoyable platformer *Tinhead* is one of the earliest console games that Stuart worked on.

starting with console games and later moving on to the *X-COM* sequels and ports. My job was to lead a project and ensure a game was delivered on time, within budget, and to a high standard of quality. Since MicroProse had a mix of internal development and external collaborations with third-party developers, I spent a lot of time travelling to meet these developers – armed with a Ford Mondeo company car and a 'brick' of a car phone. But the industry was beginning to change rapidly and the internet was starting to capture everyone's imagination. I shared an office with another producer who had once been highly regarded but had become somewhat complacent and I didn't want to fall into the same pattern. I joined a new dot-com gaming start-up called Entertainment Online.

You later moved to Bullfrog. How did you find introducing a producer role at a company which had been largely dominated by Peter Molyneux?
By the time I joined, Bullfrog had been acquired by EA, and Peter Molyneux had already left the company. I believe I was the first producer they hired, stepping into a company that, frankly, wasn't very receptive to the idea of producers. Many of the team were still reticent about the EA takeover and didn't appreciate the idea of someone stepping in to 'tell them what to do'. Fortunately, Alan Wright, the project lead on *Populous: The Beginning*, was incredibly welcoming. He was happy for me to take over tasks he didn't enjoy – like planning and production management – so he could focus entirely on what he loved: programming. That collaboration worked well and made my transition smoother.

What games were being worked on?
When I joined, Bullfrog had about three or four teams in place working on *Theme Park World*,

» [Game Gear] Stuart oversaw games like *F-15 Strike Eagle* while he was working at MicroProse.

Populous: The Beginning and *Indestructibles*, an open-world superhero game that, unfortunately, never saw the light of day. It was an interesting time. With Peter gone and many key figures leaving to form Lionhead, there was undoubtedly a shift in dynamics. My role as a producer was to bring structure and organisation to projects, which the team initially resisted but eventually appreciated as they saw the benefits. Despite the changes, the talent and creativity within Bullfrog remained undeniable, and it was an exciting place to work.

What challenges and opportunities did the transition from MS-DOS games to Windows-only bring?

I vividly remember the early days of 3D cards at MicroProse, particularly the 3DFX Voodoo cards. Supporting them was incredibly challenging at first, but the introduction of DirectX changed everything, simplifying development and making life much easier for developers. Developing for MS-DOS, by contrast, was always a tough experience – both for developers and consumers. At university, getting games like *Wing Commander* or *Ultima VII* to run was a nightmare. You had to use a memory manager (QEMM was probably the best at the time), but even then, trying to free up enough base memory felt like it required a degree in computing to figure out. The transition to Windows, powered by tools like DirectX, was a huge leap forward.

> "I won't sugarcoat it. Working with Peter Molyneux can be challenging"
> Stuart Whyte

Bullfrog ended up merging into EA UK. Were you sad to see the end of the brand?

I was definitely sad to see the end of Bullfrog as a brand. For gamers, the Bullfrog name stood for something unique. You knew you were getting a game that was quirky, original and often quite British in its sensibilities. In truth, though, the end of Bullfrog as a brand was largely due to the rise of *Harry Potter*. We secured the *Harry Potter* IP in the early days of the franchise, well before the films came out. As the *Potter* phenomenon grew into a massive juggernaut, the target audience for those games was so different from Bullfrog's traditional fanbase that it no longer made sense to include the Bullfrog logo on the box.

But how exciting was it to be the senior producer on the *Harry Potter* franchise?

When it first came up, I hadn't even heard of it. Only a couple of books had been published at that point, so I went out and bought them to get up to speed. I thought they were great. Being a fan of *The Hobbit* as a kid, I appreciated good fantasy aimed at younger audiences. Still, none of us could have imagined just how massive the franchise would become.

Did you meet JK Rowling or any of the actors?

Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance to meet JK Rowling or visit the film sets. However, early on, we sent her a comprehensive list of questions to help flesh out areas of the Potterverse that weren't yet detailed. Months went by with no response, and we'd almost given up hope. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, she sent back a 60-page document. It was incredible. She went into immense detail about the world, much of which hadn't been covered anywhere else at the time.

You kind of retained the Bullfrog connection with your next move to Lionhead. Was this the first time you'd worked with Peter Molyneux?

I'd met Peter socially a few times during my time at Bullfrog and we had some great conversations about games and game development. I also became friendly with the head of production at Lionhead, and we started discussing the possibility of me joining the team. For the first month at Lionhead, I'd come to work and head straight to the

THE WHYTE STUFF

Stuart discusses five games he helped craft

TINHEAD

■"Games released by MicroProse didn't always launch globally. *Tinhead* was released in 1993 but only in the US on the Sega Genesis. Interestingly, a completed SNES version remained unreleased until 2019, when Piko Interactive picked it up – a remarkable 26-year gap between platform releases!"

PIRATES! GOLD

■"The MicroProse Hunt Valley team created the game for the Genesis. We converted that codebase to run on the CD32 in just six weeks! It had a CD-quality orchestral score created from scratch and our team singing *What Shall We Do With The Drunken Sailor*?, recorded in the MicroProse boardroom."

X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP

■"*Terror From The Deep* wasn't a massive departure from the original *X-COM: UFO Defense* (inspired by the evolutionary approach of *Doom* to *Doom 2*) but we made significant additions: the variety of locations, enemies, and weapons. I'm proud of the lasting impact it had on the *X-COM* franchise."

POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING

■"I joined Bullfrog in 1998 and my focus for the first 18 months was *Populous: The Beginning*. I didn't pay much attention to anything else! The move to Windows made it easier to support graphics and hardware advancements. DirectX compatibility opened up opportunities to create smoother experiences."

THE MOVIES

■"At Bullfrog, we felt the '*Theme*' franchise had so much untapped potential. We explored ideas like *Theme Resort* and *Theme Hollywood* and, at Lionhead, we created *The Movies*, a blend of *The Sims* meets Hollywood. It was thrilling to see this exciting concept fully developed and brought to life."

STUART'S FIRST ADVENTURE

On writing for Amstrad Action

■ Before Stuart began working for videogame studios, he made a name for himself writing *Amstrad Action*'s adventure column. Or at least, he made a name for the Balrog, the pseudonym he used throughout his time on the magazine.

Starting in October 1989 when he was just 17 years old, he took over from another writer who called themselves The Pilgrim. "I'd eagerly read the column each month to stay updated on the text adventure game scene," Stuart says. Then something caught his eye.

Stuart was already active in the adventure game scene. He'd built a small community of like-minded adventurers who'd talk on the phone in the evenings, swapping tips and discussing the latest games. It had made him rather knowledgeable so he entered a massive competition launched in the February 1989 issue of *Amstrad Action* to find the Amstrad Adventurer Of The Year. "It pushed me to the limits of my adventure game knowledge but I managed to complete it and win," he says.

This led to his golden opportunity. "Unbeknownst to me, the writer of The Pilgrim had taken a new job and was planning to leave *Amstrad Action*," Stuart explains. "One day, the magazine's editor called me in a bind. They needed someone with encyclopaedic knowledge of adventure games to take over the column and asked if I'd be interested in writing it. I excitedly agreed and began my journey as a columnist."

So how did he come up with the name, the Balrog? "My first column appeared in issue 49 and was still written under the pseudonym The Pilgrim but the original Pilgrim wasn't too happy about it, so I had to come up with a new one. I almost chose Floyd inspired by the friendly droid from Infocom's *Planetfall* and *Stationfall*. I considered the Bunyan, named after John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

"Ultimately, I decided on the Balrog because The Pilgrim often mentioned having a pet Balrog in his dungeon and I loved the idea of the pet taking over and eating its owner. I'd also just read *The Lord Of The Rings*, and the scene with the Balrog in the Mines Of Moria had left a lasting impression on me."

» Stuart's first ever column as the Balrog appeared in issue 50 of *Amstrad Action*.

boardroom where I'd spend hours with Peter Molyneux, Mark Webley, Louise Murray and others, playing a pre-release version of *Fable*. It was the final stretch of development, and Peter was using this time to polish and refine the game by playing it repeatedly. It was such a fun and fascinating experience to witness the game's evolution so close to its completion.

> "The end of Bullfrog as a brand was largely due to the rise of Harry Potter"
> Stuart Whyte

So how would you reflect on your years at Lionhead. In the mid-2000s, had gaming expectations changed?

I joined Lionhead at a critical time in its history. The studio had achieved great success with the release of the original *Black & White*, and the company had grown significantly in the aftermath of that game's success. By then, there were four main internal teams: Big Blue Box, working on *Fable*; Intrepid, working on *BC*; the team developing *The Movies*; and the Black & White team, focussed on *Black & White 2*. All of these projects had been in development for some time, and each faced its own unique challenges.

That sounds hectic.

Despite the struggles, it was an incredibly exciting period. Lionhead was home to an exceptionally talented group of developers, and there was a real buzz around the games we were creating. It felt like we were working on projects that had the potential to push boundaries and break new ground in gaming. For me, it was fascinating to experience game development from the perspective of an independent studio. Having previously worked for larger, publisher-owned companies, I gained a new appreciation for the creative freedom and challenges that came with independence. Working closely with production teams at Xbox, EA and Activision during this time was a fantastic learning experience. I gained valuable insights into how publishers and developers could collaborate effectively, and the lessons I learned during my time at Lionhead have stayed with me throughout my career.

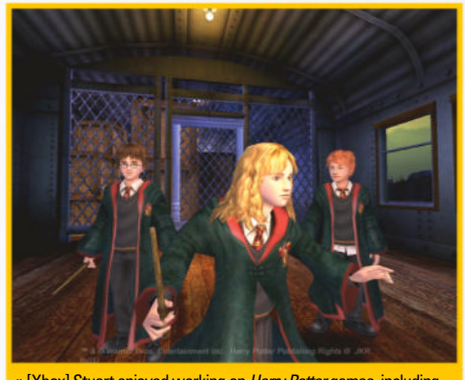
How did you handle the acquisition by Microsoft Game Studios?

I won't lie. We were all incredibly excited by the prospect of Microsoft buying us. The idea had been floating around for a while, we had a strong relationship with the team at Xbox, but Microsoft didn't seem interested initially. They'd acquired another team shortly before our discussions began (I can't recall who), and that integration hadn't gone particularly well. As a result, they weren't actively looking for another studio at the time – or so we thought. Instead, we came extremely close to being acquired by Ubisoft. It got to the point where Yves Guillemot, Ubisoft's CEO, visited us in secret and held one-on-one meetings with the leadership team. The deal was just days away from being finalised, but something about it didn't sit right and Peter Molyneux made the tough decision to walk away from the Ubisoft deal. Thankfully, Xbox had a change of heart and acquired Lionhead in 2006 when we were right in the middle of developing *Fable 2*. The acquisition provided us with the stability and resources we needed to fully realise our ambitions for the sequel.

Why did you leave for Supermassive Games?

I won't sugarcoat it. Working with Peter Molyneux can be challenging. He's an incredibly persuasive and talented game designer, but he has a tendency to design on the fly. Famously, the team would hold their breath every time Peter attended a big trade conference like E3 because he often announced new features that weren't planned. This would leave the team scrambling back in the UK to figure out

» The Lionhead Leadership team celebrating the sale of Lionhead in Chamonix (from left to right – Russell Shaw, Paul McLaughlin, Tim Rance, Peter Molyneux, Steve Hutchings, Peter Murphy and Stuart Whyte)



» [Xbox] Stuart enjoyed working on *Harry Potter* games, including *Prisoner Of Azkaban*. "I'm proud to have played a small part in bringing that magical world to life for fans," he says.

» Stuart (pictured left, with Louise Murray and John McCormack) celebrates winning a BAFTA for *Fable II*.

how to make those features a reality. As a producer, this dynamic was even more intense. I joined Lionhead as executive producer on *The Movies* and was later promoted to head of production, and eventually chief publishing officer. While I had some fantastic experiences, there were moments of tension, like during the development of *Fable: The Journey*. Peter insisted the game wasn't "on rails", but I remain adamant that it was! After that, we were working on *Milo & Kate* and a new project called *Fable Opal*, which struggled to gain traction. After eight years of working with Peter, I felt that our relationship was stagnating and we weren't making the progress I hoped for. The tipping point came and I handed in my notice. Coincidentally, three other senior staff members did the same that day.

And why did you go back to Lionhead?
I joined Supermassive at an exciting time for the studio but in my first week, I was approached by Mark Webley and Louise Murray from Lionhead saying Peter was leaving to set up 22 Cans. I was offered the opportunity to return to a post-Molyneux Lionhead and help resolve the challenges the studio faced. I returned in 2012 as studio director.

You later started your own company, Wildebeetle. What happened there?
Lionhead sadly shut down in April 2016 and after leaving, I was eager to set up a new AAA RPG team in Guildford. I teamed up with some friends who had previously run a mobile development studio called Rodeo Games,

» Here's a selection of the many games that Stuart has worked on. As you can see, it's a very impressive list.

» [Xbox 360] *Fable* had been the third best-selling game on the original Xbox so a sequel – *Fable II* – was always inevitable.

» [PC] *Black & White 2* sold more than 100,000 copies in the UK alone.

and we started pitching an indie, turn-based, *X-COM*-style game set in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* universe. We eventually decided to pivot away from *Mistborn* to a more ambitious original concept: a hybrid of *Fable*, *Metal Gear Solid V* and *Borderlands*. Initially called *Guild Of Heroes* and later renamed *Sanctuary*, it was an ambitious pitch and I learned about setting up a company, managing contracts, handling cash flow, and navigating the complexities of pitching to publishers. But while we came tantalisingly close to signing a deal, Sony Interactive Entertainment pulled out at the 11th hour. It was a heartbreaking moment.

But you ended up working for PlayStation London Studio. What sticks in your mind the most about your time there?
When I joined, the team had just released their first VR title, *PlayStation VR Worlds*, and pre-production had begun on *Blood & Truth*. While *VR Worlds* performed well commercially (thanks in part to bundling), it received mixed reviews, with a Metacritic score of 59% and I was tasked with revitalising the studio and turning it into a AAA VR developer. I'd never worked in VR before, and the transition from "flat gaming" to VR was both challenging and exciting. It reminded me of the shift from 2D to 3D during my MicroProse days.

How much of a blow was its closure?
It was deeply disappointing for all of us. We worked incredibly hard to turn the studio around, delivering a hit game with *Blood & Truth*. It achieved a Metacritic score of 80% and was named *Edge*'s PlayStation Game Of The Year in 2019. We also earned 'Best Place To Work' awards, which reflected the positive culture we'd built.

You're now at the start of a new adventure with *Astrid*. Can you tell us more about that?
I joined Astrid Entertainment at the beginning of 2025, and it's been incredibly exciting so far. When I met with Sharon Tal Yguado, the founder, I was immediately impressed by her passion and vision for creating something fresh and innovative in the gaming space. Sharon has an impressive background – she's a former executive at Fox TV and Amazon Prime and was involved in groundbreaking shows like *The Boys*, *The Walking Dead* and *The Lord Of The Rings: Rings Of Power*. Her creative drive and commitment to storytelling are truly inspiring.

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Stuart's time at E-On was brief but rewarding

■ The mid-Nineties was a time of change. "This was a seminal point in the industry," Stuart says. "I remember being at MicroProse and seeing a Japanese PlayStation running *Ridge Racer* for the first time – it really felt that the power of the arcade had finally come to the living room and everything changed after that!"

Sensing an opportunity to try something new and fearing becoming stagnant at MicroProse, Stuart joined Entertainment Online (E-ON) in May 1996. "It was founded by the finance director of the VR company Virtuality and it was incredibly forward-thinking for its time," he says. "The company aimed to create a family friendly gaming channel on the internet, offering a service remarkably similar to what Microsoft's Game Pass would later become. Users paid a monthly subscription and gained access to a revolving library of single and multiplayer games."

Stuart was employee number three and the company grew fast over the next couple of years, employing more than 100 employees across offices in Leicester, San Francisco and Germany. "However, as was the case with many early dot-com ventures, E-On didn't survive the bursting of the bubble."

» An advert for Entertainment Online aimed at PC gamers in 1996.

Silent Hill 3

WORTH THE WAIT

» PLAYSTATION 2 » 2003 » TEAM SILENT

Once upon a time when I worked in insurance, I faked an illness so I could go home early. The reason? I'd simply forgotten *Silent Hill 2* had been released that day, so I left work, purchased a copy on the way home and played it all weekend.

Despite the deceptive lengths I went to in order to play Team Silent's sequel, I never took such extreme measures to play *Silent Hill 3* – in fact, it's been sitting unplayed on my gaming shelf for over 15 years. I'm not sure why, but when I was looking for something new to play in early January of 2024, it was the first game I settled on. I'm glad I finally gave it a try because it's a genuinely horrific experience. I mean that in a good way.

When I first started on *games™*, you'd have to walk past the team making the guide magazines if you wanted a cup of tea. I didn't mind getting the tea for everyone, as it meant I could look at the games being played and that was my first encounter with Heather Morris, *Silent Hill 3*'s plucky protagonist. The story that pushes Heather constantly forward isn't quite as compelling or as thematically mature as *Silent Hill 2*'s, but it's still entertaining and ties in neatly to the events of the original *Silent Hill*.

While Masahiro Ito's creature designs are as gruesome and grotesque as ever, the environments that Heather traverses are just as memorable because they're just so grotty and dismal to explore. The mall Heather first wakes up in is filled with neglected stores, grubby-looking furniture and marked walls, while an amusement park that appears later in the game is anything but fun.

For all its dinginess and squalor, *Silent Hill 3* is a very technically impressive PS2 game that still looks terrific today, particularly if you're fortunate enough to run it through the RetroTink 4K like I did. It's unlikely that Konami will remake it like *Silent Hill 2*, which is a shame, as it's now rapidly rising in price. If you do get the opportunity to try Team Silent's game, it's hard to see how you'll be disappointed by it. It's a genuinely worthy sequel and I regret that it took me so long to experience it. ✱

» ModRetro makes its hardware debut with the Game Boy-compatible Chromatic this month, and it's certainly worth a look. Over the page you'll find more reviews, including the return of, erm, Donkey Kong Country Returns

» The Chromatic is an attractive machine, and it feels plenty durable.

Chromatic

21ST CENTURY GAME BOY

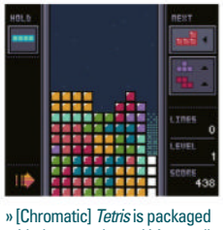
INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** $199 (APPROX £165)
- **PUBLISHER:** MODRETRO
- **DEVELOPER:** MODRETRO
- **BUY IT FROM:** MODRETRO.COM

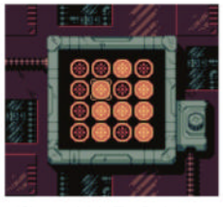
The Game Boy family of consoles was enormously popular, but the march of time has left the hardware feeling tired – particularly thanks to their dated LCD displays. Enter the Chromatic, which is touted as "the ultimate retro cartridge gaming console" by its manufacturer, ModRetro – a new venture from Oculus VR founder Palmer Luckey. The system achieves compatibility with Game Boy and Game Boy Color games using FPGA technology, similar to what is used in Analogue's consoles and the MiSTer, and is built from materials that are designed to give the console a premium feel and maximum durability. But can it live up to the hype?

First impressions are certainly good, as, the Chromatic is a nice-looking machine that clearly takes its design cues primarily from the original Game Boy – a true design classic. Fans may be a little surprised to see that none of the various colour options take after the original 1989 colour scheme, though. While we didn't try running it over with a car as seen in the marketing materials, the Chromatic does feel particularly sturdy too. The magnesium alloy shell is tough, if a little cold when you first pick it up, and the buttons stood up to our particularly vigorous *Street Fighter Alpha* sessions.

The LCD screen is excellent too. Matching the 160x144 resolution of the original display, it reproduces colours excellently and is sharp and so bright that the higher brightness settings seem almost



» [Chromatic] *Tetris* is packaged with the console, and it's a really good new version.



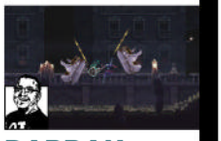
» [Chromatic] *In The Dark 2*, another ModRetro release, is an RPG with *Lights Out*-style puzzles.

» We found the Chromatic easy to use, including when updating the console's firmware.

BRIEF HISTORY

» The Chromatic is the first piece of hardware from ModRetro. Although the company is new, the name dates back to a forum founded in 2009 by company founder Palmer Luckey, who later achieved fame as the founder of the Quest headset manufacturer Oculus VR, which was acquired by Facebook in 2014. This is his first gaming venture since leaving the company in 2017 – his focus in the intervening years has been the defence technology company Anduril Industries.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Blasphemous 2

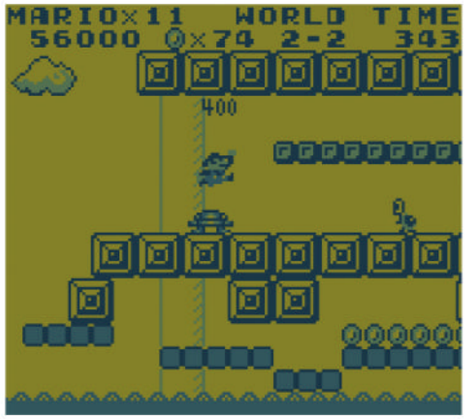
Yes I know it came out ages ago and it's not a retro game, but it has an amazing pixel-art look and strong *Symphony Of The Night* vibes. I love it.

NICK

Donkey Kong Country Returns HD

It's amazing how quality reissues have sustained the Switch consistently for almost eight years, and this is the latest in that long line.

» [Chromatic] We took these screenshots via the Chromatic's USB-C output. As you can see, it looks great.



» [Chromatic] One colour scheme for greyscale games attempts to mimic the original Game Boy's screen.

»The use of disposable batteries is certainly an unusual choice for modern hardware.

excessive. The display is also more responsive than the older LCD displays, cutting out the ghosting that was common on them. As with the original Game Boy Color, it's possible to get different colour palettes for greyscale games by holding down a combination of buttons when the system is powered on.

The Game Boy Color link cable and IR port are included, as well as a USB-C port that serves various purposes. If connected to a computer, the Chromatic will be detected as a webcam, allowing you to stream gameplay. It's arguable that output to HDMI would have been preferable, but this method does mean that no additional hardware is needed. Updating the firmware also requires connection to a computer, and it's a pleasingly simple process thanks to the MRUpdater Windows utility – Mac and Linux versions are promised, but as yet unavailable.

The USB-C connector can also be used to power the machine, which is otherwise powered by three AA batteries, giving approximately six hours life depending on brightness. We understand the goal of keeping the hardware usable in the long term, but it does feel a little inconvenient. ModRetro has promised a Power Core battery pack which will use the USB-C port for charging, but has yet to confirm a price or release date for it. One small mercy is that the batteries are bypassed when using USB-C power, saving charge for when it's needed.

As for games, we tried a variety of original cartridges and modern releases and encountered no bugs or unusual behaviours. Notably, the Chromatic doesn't offer save states or any modern conveniences like that. The console is packaged with a new, officially licensed *Tetris* cartridge and it's a great modern version of the puzzle classic, with features like the Hold button and T-Spins, but it offers plenty of customisation options so you can have an experience more akin to the 1989 version if you please. ModRetro is also publishing both new games and reissues of old games, sold separately for $29.99-$44.99 (approx £25-£38).

The aforementioned popularity of the Game Boy family means that ModRetro's machine does face some stiff competition. For a start, pre-modded Game Boy Color consoles are readily available and tend to come in a little cheaper than the Chromatic, though quality and reliability will depend on the modder's skill.

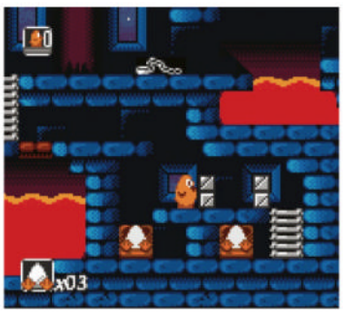
More directly comparable are two FPGA-based handhelds which offer Game Boy and Game Boy Color compatibility. The FunnyPlaying FPGBC lacks the premium materials and streaming options of the Chromatic, but is significantly cheaper at $99. The Analogue Pocket is slightly more expensive than the Chromatic at $219, but it is considerably more versatile – it supports Game Boy Advance games out of the box, and a range of other systems via optional cartridge adaptors and OpenFPGA. Both of those consoles include rechargeable batteries as standard, too.

With a variety of other hardware options catering for a range of needs and budgets, only you can know if the Chromatic is right for you. Still, there's no denying that it does what it sets out to do very well indeed, and we'd be hard-pressed to imagine anyone coming away disappointed if they choose to purchase ModRetro's machine. ✱

In a nutshell

If you want an excellent way to enjoy your Game Boy and Game Boy Color cartridges, the Chromatic will suit your needs, but its price point does make the alternatives worth considering.

» [Chromatic] Another greyscale Game Boy palette looks closer to the Game Boy Pocket's display.



» [Chromatic] *Toki Tori* is one of the games being reissued by ModRetro to go with the Chromatic.

» [Chromatic] *Street Fighter Alpha* really tested the handheld's buttons, and it passed with flying colours.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Donkey Kong Country Returns HD

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £49.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

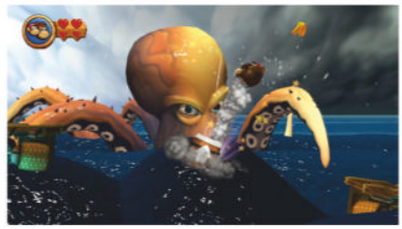
This late remaster comes as a bit of a surprise, as Wii games haven't received Switch upgrades nearly as often as Wii U ones have. Still, we certainly welcomed the idea of having a shiny high-definition version of Retro Studios' first *Donkey Kong Country* game to go along with the port of *Tropical Freeze*. In practice, the results still make for a worthwhile game but one that has a few more blemishes than we'd prefer.

First, the good news – the game plays as well as it ever did, but with a few inclusions that will likely keep you from just going back and picking up a Wii copy. The most major new addition is the Modern mode, which gives you more hearts and additional shop items to lower the overall difficulty of the game, which could border on frustrating in its original incarnation. The extra stages from the 3DS port are included too, and the visual presentation is generally strong throughout thanks to the high resolution and some occasional upgrades. If you don't like motion controls, they're not mandatory here either.

Unfortunately, there is some bad news to be had. The graphical upgrade hasn't carried everything across, and direct comparisons with the original Wii version do show some missing visual effects. While these aren't too bothersome most of the time, it's certainly a shame to say that this isn't just strictly better than its predecessor. Likewise, there are a couple of framerate drops that come as a surprise given that this is an update of a game from 2010 – you would think the Switch could handle this with ease.

Though this is arguably the best version of *Donkey Kong Country Returns* to get now, as it beats the Wii version on content and the 3DS version on visuals, the flaws and lack of additions stings – especially when Nintendo is asking £50 for it. It's a nice effort, but not top banana this time.

» Score **78%**



» [Switch] The new water effects are one of the nicer parts of the visual overhaul here.

» [Switch] A colourful clutch of crabs threatens Donkey and Diddy, both of whom remain nonchalant.

Accolade Sports Collection

» **System:** PS4 (version tested), PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, PC » **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Here's a collection comprising the Mega Drive versions of *Summer Challenge, Winter Challenge, Hoops: Shut Up And Jam* and *Hardball,* and the DOS version of *Hardball 2*. With two multi-sport games in there, this collection certainly offers plenty in the way of variety and the games are presented with solid emulation and visual options. However, most of these games were considered to be solid showings rather than world-beaters back in their day, and the once-impressive 3D visuals of the *Challenge* games make for stilted gameplay today. This is a collection best recommended to those with strong nostalgia for at least one of the games.

NICK THORPE

» Score **65%**

Tales Of Monsterland DX

» **System:** Game Boy Color » **Buy it from:** modretro.com » **Buy it for:** $39.99 (approx. £33)

This pleasant platform adventure tasks you with finding out the cause of a monster problem that has driven visitors away from a formerly thriving village. To do this, you'll need to assume a variety of inhuman forms of your own in order to navigate the world, taking advantage of the werewolf's strength or the mermaid's underwater abilities. It's a fun little quest, with attractive colour visuals and enjoyable music, but the emphasis has to be on the word little. While there are incentives to explore, including book pages to collect to uncover the full story, this is quite a short game that is fun while it lasts.

NICK THORPE

» Score **76%**

Under Defeat

» **System:** Switch (tested) PC, PS5, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

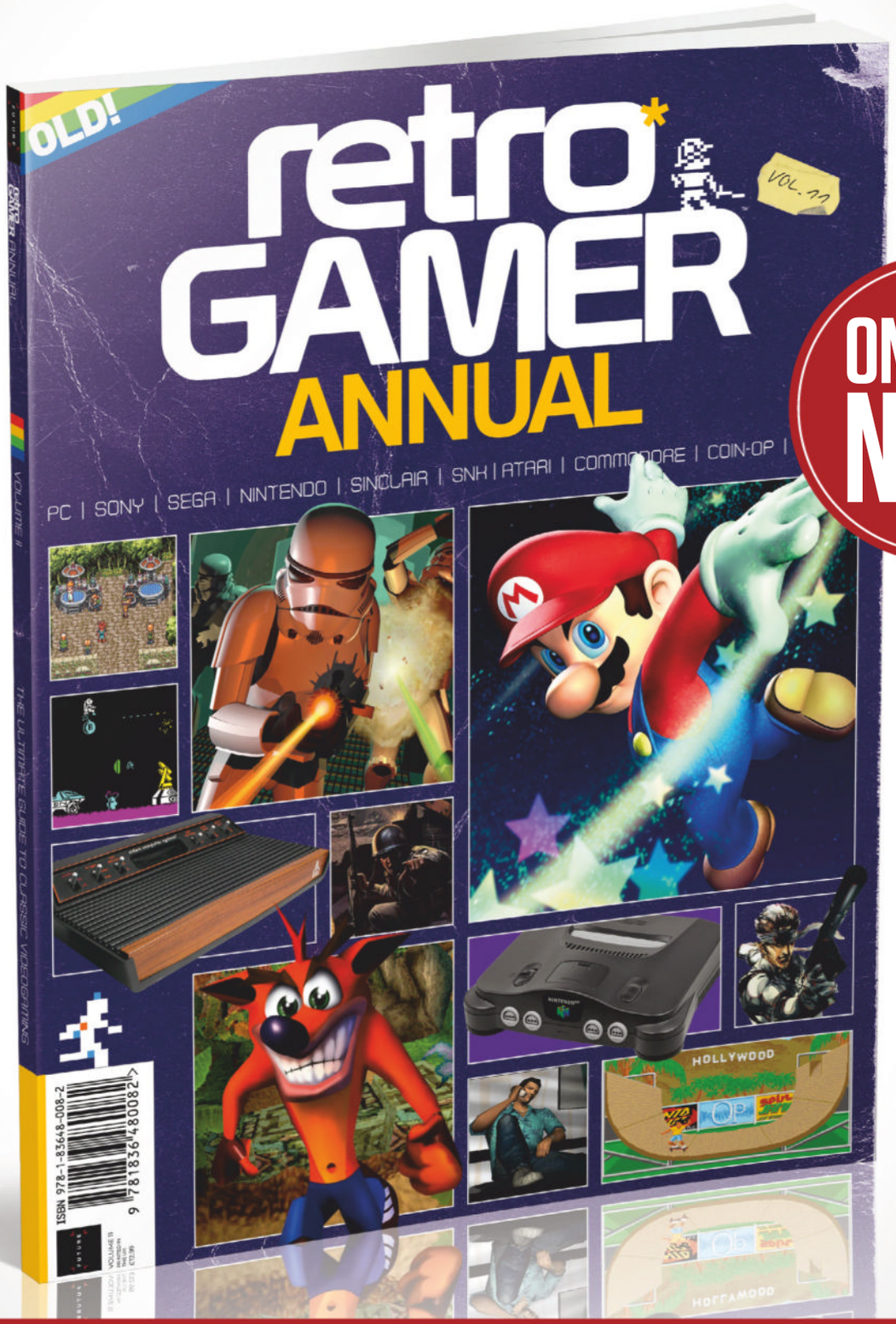
Like *Donkey Kong Country Returns,* this is also the third time *Under Defeat* has been released on home systems. Thankfully, unlike Nintendo's game it comes with a more sensible price tag and more substantial extras. First up is New Order Mode+, an arranged version of the widescreen New Order Mode which was first introduced in the original HD versions. There's also a new 'Boosted' soundtrack by Shinji Hosoe, while all the Japanese DLC is also included. It makes this new iteration feel like a worthwhile update over the previous home versions and it remains a very good shmup, even though it packs a significant challenge that may put off newcomers to the genre.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **84%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2024

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!



ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

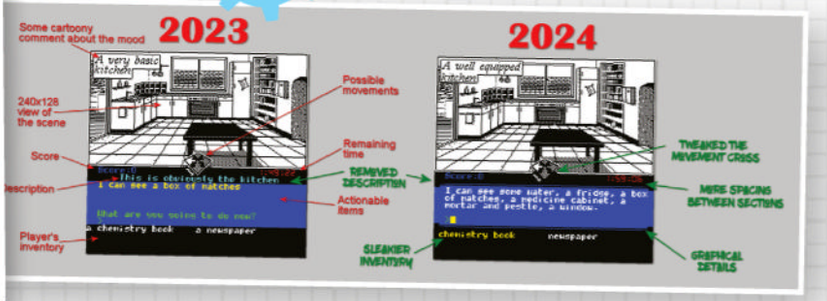
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

Score:50
1:55:41
I can see a mixtape, an open car boot, an open car door, a closed petrol tank
newspaper
rough map
mortar and pestle

<!--- ORIC] HERE'S THE ABANDONED CAR SCREEN, REFERRED TO IN THE CLOSE ENCOUNTERS PANEL. --->

<!--- HERE'S A RECENT EVOLUTION OF THE USER INTERFACE. --->



<!--- [ORIC] A COMPARISON BETWEEN A SCENE IN THE 1984 ORIGINAL AND THE 2024 REMAKE. WOOF. --->

What are you going to do now ?
? N
Moves 4
Okay
You are on a huge area of lawn
I can see nothing of interest here
Exits lead North, South and East.
What are you going to do now ?
? N
Moves 5
Okay
You are in an imposing entrance hall
I can see an alsatian growling at you
What are you going to do now ?
Is that Cerberus?
Score:0
I can see a dog growling at you.

<MAIN HEADER>

FRESH ENCOUNTER

<INTRO> FRENCH PROGRAMMING VETERAN MICKAEL POINTIER HAS REMASTERED SEVERN SOFTWARE'S 1984 ORIC TEXT ADVENTURE </INTRO>

<INTRO> WE HAVE SAD NEWS TO SHARE, WITH THE DEATH OF NEW ZEALAND-BORN PROGRAMMER MARK SIBLY IN DECEMBER. MARK WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORIGINAL AMIGA VERSION OF BLITZ BASIC, A POPULAR LANGUAGE THAT HELPED CREATE MANY GAMES – INCLUDING TOTAL WORMAGE, THE FORERUNNER OF THE CLASSIC WORMS. THE LANGUAGE MOVED TO WINDOWS, WHILE MARK WOULD DEVELOP A SIMILAR LANGUAGE, MONKEY, IN THE 2010S. DEVELOPMENT OF BLITZ BASIC CONTINUES UNDER THE NEW NAME AMIBLITZ. REST IN PEACE, MARK. </INTRO>

<!--- MICKAEL POINTIER AT HIS WORKSTATION. --->

<BODY> **Our latest coder received an Oric in 1983 and then discovered a rather unusual game.** "Finding a game like *Encounter* in a shop in Angers, France, in 1984 was at best an anomaly," Mickael tells us. "The game was 100% in English. That became the way I started learning English, using a French-English dictionary to figure out what the heck was 'a thug' or 'some twine' or a 'greenhouse.'" Suitably inspired, Mickael tried to add graphics himself. "I spent time adding HIRES, CURSET, DRAW, CIRCLE and FILL commands to draw trees, clouds and a house… after a couple of weeks, I had only managed to get a few scenes out of 40+ when the machine ran out of memory."

In 2018, he returned to the project for a new YouTube series. "I did 17 videos; there was a working *Encounter*, still in BASIC, but with saved high scores, an intro sequence and proper graphical scenes for each location. No sound, no music, no animation, and it was still the same game at the core."

Mickael then reworked the game in C, using Paint Shop Pro to create new graphics and the on-screen icons for navigation. "The game uses more contextual actions to figure out what makes sense – if you are at the right location and you use the right item, the right thing happens," he explains. Mickael's biggest challenge was the 32K memory of the Oric. "I needed to cache a lot of data because a floppy disk is quite slow," he adds. "Size-wise, it's probably one of the largest released Oric games. A normal Oric 3-inch floppy can store about 360KB of raw data. The Floppy Builder system used on this game does not have a DOS at all, just a tiny loader that uses custom storage on disk, and everything is compressed on the disk and uncompressed on the fly, so ultimately there is about 751KB of binary data on the disk," Mickael continues. "The 2018 version of *Encounter* had just 50 images, this new version with

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

A SLICK INTRO

<The gorgeous intro sequence starts with the animated old-school typewriter in your office. />

CLEVER MASKING

<On-screen objects use masking and overlays to change how they look – such as opening the car's doors. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

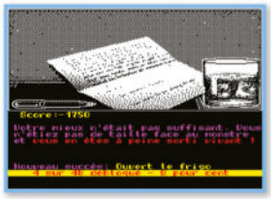
Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

overlays and cutscenes has 125, and then there's the sound and music from Per."

We've also been told there will be a limited number of physical copies available. "I will gift these 20 homemade versions to prominent members of the Oric community," Mickael tells us. "I will also have a contest to give away a couple. People will have access to the label and the inlay so they can print their own. Let's be realistic: it's still an 8-bit text adventure game for a quite obscure system!"

The download for *Encounter* is at bit.ly/encounter-oric and on Steam. After six years of work, Mickael will be taking a break – but has other Oric projects to return to. "I still have my *Dungeon Master* prototype, as well as *Quantum FX Turbo Ultra* which I'd like to finish. The Oric deserves a proper futuristic racing game!" </BODY>

<INTRO> WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN MICKAEL'S GAME </INTRO>



EN FRAINCAIS

<The game has been translated into Mikael's native French as well as English, so bonne chance mate! />

DEATH COMES OFTEN

<In common with classic text adventures, there are sudden-death situations that you need to avoid. Bang, you're dead. />

MUSIC MAESTRO

<Per Almered (pictured with his C64) created six music tracks and twenty sound effects especially for the game. />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> NOW ORGANISED BY FORMAT, HERE ARE THE LATEST NEWS BYTES TO ENJOY </INTRO>

<**Amiga:** Electric Black Sheep blew our minds with the FMV game *Star Dust Wars (Director's Cut)*. Name your price and get it from bit.ly/stardustwars />

<**Amstrad CPC:** RetroSouls converted the rock-throwing *Gommy: Medieval Defender*, which is also available for MSX and Spectrum. Grab it from bit.ly/gommy-cpc />

<**Atari STE:** The superb racing game *FASTER* from Jonathan Thomas – previewed in **RG**265 – is now available for free at bit.ly/faster-ste />

<**Atari XE/XL:** Vega released his superb *Bubble Bobble* conversion which needs 64K, in disk or DCART format. You can start blowing bubbles at bit.ly/bubblebobble-xe />

<**C64:** Try to save Santa and his elves in the *Lemmings*-inspired puzzle game *Santa's Workout 4* from Vector5 Games (and check out the whole series). Name your price and get it from bit.ly/santasworkout4 />

<**eBook:** Sean McManus released a free eBook collecting his articles from *Crash* and *Amtix*, along with Amstrad type-in listings. Download it at bit.ly/mcmanus-ebook />

<**Game Boy Color:** Mico27 produced a superb remake of the classic *Super Mario Bros* – with a second quest, randomiser mode, and more – in GB Studio, showing what the utility can do. Try it for free at bit.ly/mariomini-gbc />

<**Lynx:** Lynx Jam 2024 had its own custom tile set and theme of *Maximum Destruction*. Find the entries at bit.ly/lynxjam2024 />

<**Mega Duck:** Three great Game Boy shmups were patched by bbbbbr – *Nocptern*, *Genesis II*, and *Lunar Lancer* (reviewed this issue) Discover them at bbbbbr.itch.io />

<**PET:** *Wolfenstein 3D* for the 32K PET – that's what Jimbo achieved with *Escape From PETSCII Castle*. Go exploring at bit.ly/petscii-castle />

<**SNES:** Woodfrog revealed a two-level demo of cute platformer *Till & Hat* (pictured top). Try it by visiting bit.ly/tillhat-demo />

CHAMPION CODER

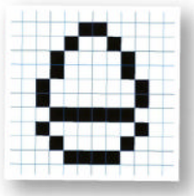
0XCODE

<INTRO> REDISCOVERING HIS CHILDHOOD ELECTRON IN THE LOFT HAS LED 0XCODE TO CODING A NEW EMULATOR </INTRO>

<INFO VISIT: BIT.LY/0XCODE-GAMES, 0XCODE6502.GITHUB.IO FORMAT: ACORN ELECTRON, BBC MICRO PREVIOUS GAMES: SOKO-BAN, PYTHON, ELECTROBOTS, ELEMENTUM WORKING ON: ELECTRONIQ BROWSER-BASED EMULATOR – BIT.LY/ELECTRONIQ FROM: THE NETHERLANDS/>

WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT?

<A Windows laptop running VSCode and tools I wrote: a 6502-macro assembler, my Acorn Electron emulator, tools for creating disk and tape images, etc. I use existing emulators for testing and modern tools for sprites (Aseprite) and maps (Tiled). />



<!--- 0XCODE HAS FOND MEMORIES OF PLAYING GAMES IN THE EIGHTIES, BUT, "ASSEMBLY WAS LIKE MAGIC TO ME BACK THEN." --->

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO CREATE AN ELECTRON EMULATOR?

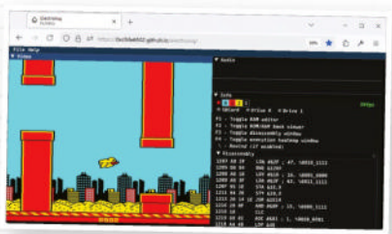
<I enjoy a challenge, learning new things, and most of all having fun. This is why I relearnt 6502 assembly and created quite a few games. The toughest parts are trying to get near-perfect timing for audio and video, supporting the many old and new hardware expansions, and getting the timing and quirks of the CPU and supporting chips just right. The Electron suffers from RAM contention between the CPU and ULA which slows down the CPU from 2MHz to 1MHz when RAM is accessed. Additionally, the CPU is halted during the active part of each scanline in high-bandwidth graphics modes. I discovered a way of exploiting a new hardware glitch not that long ago, just by experimenting with the ULA. These little things are notoriously hard to get right in an emulator. />

WHY HAVE YOU MADE ELECTRONIQ WEB-BASED?

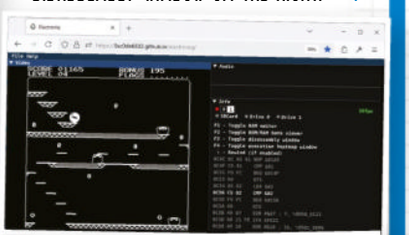
<I wanted to experiment with WebAssembly (WASM) – it should (in theory!) work in any modern browser. Electroniq is written in C; I use Emscripten to compile to WebAssembly. Some of my very timing-specific demos don't work well at all yet – 99% of games work correctly, but some advanced techniques aren't emulated correctly yet. I would like Electroniq to work on mobile devices with on-screen controls, and to expand the debugging and profiling capabilities. />

WHAT GAMES SHOULD READERS TRY?

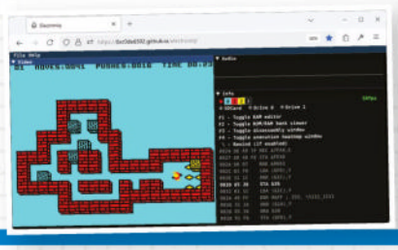
<I recommend my most recent game, *Flappy Bird*. If you like games like *Citadel*, try *Electrobots*. And if you like very tough platform games, try *Elementum*. I would also like to recommend the excellent Electron games by Snuggsy187, such as *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman*. Make sure you don't accidentally abuse the Instant Rewind feature to cheat! />

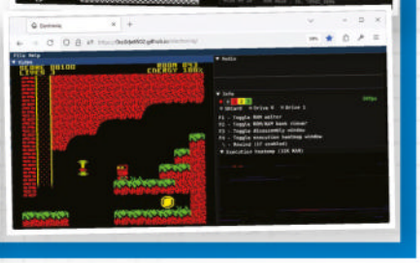


<!--- [ACORN ELECTRON] "I USUALLY MAKE THE EXTRA EFFORT TO SUPPORT THE BBC MICRO AS WELL," – FLAPPY BIRD WORKS ON BOTH. --->



<!--- [ACORN ELECTRON] ELEMENTUM RUNNING IN ELECTRONIQ, WITH THE DISASSEMBLY WINDOW ON THE RIGHT. --->





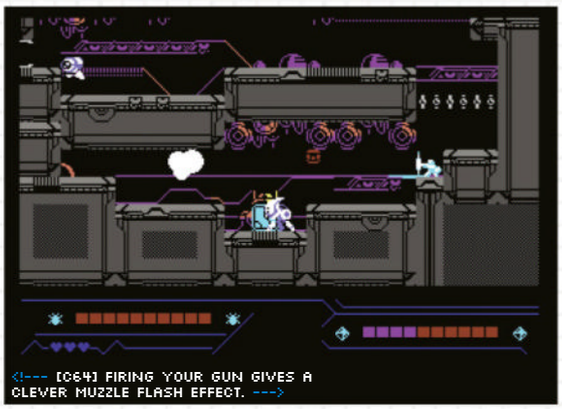
DATA BURST

INFEZTATION

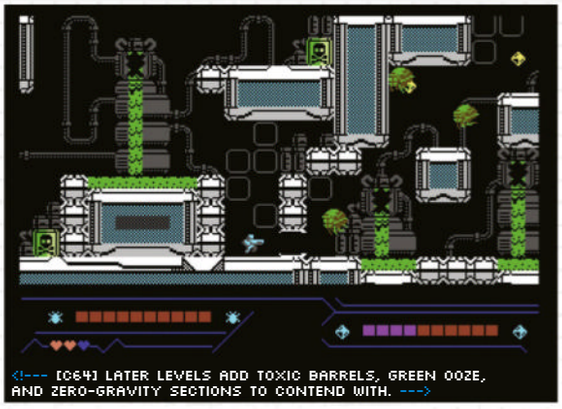
<INFO FORMAT: C64 (CURRENTLY PAL ONLY) CREDITS: MONTE BOYD PRICE: $3.99 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: BIT.LY/INFEZTATION />

<BODY> ***InfeZtation* starts with the Galactic Sheriff and her robot sidekick D3P-UT investigating a bio-research station.** Progress is achieved by clearing each section of enemies to open new airlocks. *InfeZtation* has twelve levels, each with three sectors, plus three tricky boss fights. Passcodes let you resume at later levels, but you must clear all three sectors without dying to get the next code. Crystals increase how long you can use power-ups – green for the Power Fist (one-hit kills enemies), cyan for the Jetpack, and green for Wheel Mode (allowing you to roll or drop on enemies to kill them). Red barrels grant an extra hit, while yellow barrels are smart bomb that destroy on-screen enemies. The excellent hi-res backgrounds are complemented by small, well-defined and highly detailed sprites. Gorgeous cutscene bitmaps and D3P-UT's dialogue add to the atmosphere, and *infeZtation* also has excellent music and great sound FX. The random nature of enemy placement and power-up drops is both good and bad; it can leave you stuck without help or give you an 'easy' room to clear. It's certainly tough going, even with passwords, but *infeZtation* remains another great game from Monte. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%



<!--- [C64] FIRING YOUR GUN GIVES A CLEVER MUZZLE FLASH EFFECT. --->



<!--- [C64] LATER LEVELS ADD TOXIC BARRELS, GREEN OOZE, AND ZERO-GRAVITY SECTIONS TO CONTEND WITH. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ZX NEXT] EXCELLENT PRESENTATION INCLUDES CUTSCENES AND THIS WELL-DRAWN LOADING SCREEN. --->

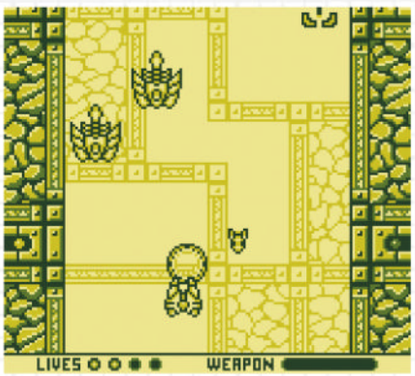
<!--- [ZX NEXT] PRIVATE THOMAS, ARMED WITH A HAND GRENADE, SPOTS A HACKED ANDROID. --->

XENO BRIGADE EXTINCTION

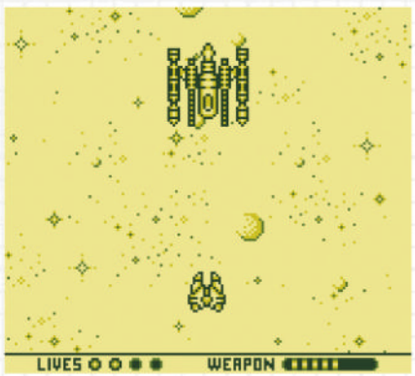
<INFO FORMAT: SINCLAIR NEXT (1MB) CREDITS: GREENMAN GAMES (DEVELOPER), TECHNOSHED (MUSIC) PRICE: £9.99 (DOWNLOAD) / £22 (PHYSICAL) WEB: BIT.LY/XENO-NEXT />

<BODY> **On Vadoom 3, Xeno Brigade marines are hunting down a dangerous alien queen.** Across seven maps reminiscent of the classic *Laser Squad*, one or two players must take control of the aliens or the marines to complete a task – from escorting the queen to safety to destroying DNA research. With two starting difficulty settings, levels must be completed in one-player mode to unlock the next, and the Extreme difficulty is unlocked upon completion. Good graphics, background music and some basic sounds set the atmosphere. The menus take a little getting used to and the difficulty level is high, but this is a competent and unusual strategy game – especially when controlling the aliens, who can infect marines and mutate into stronger forms. </BODY>

SCORE: 80%



<!--- [GAME BOY] I'M HIT! NARROW PASSAGEWAYS AND RELENTLESS ENEMY WAVES TAKE THEIR TOLL. --->



<!--- [GAME BOY] THE FIRST BOSS IS EASIER TO DEFEAT USING THE MORE POWERFUL A-BUTTON WEAPON. --->

LUNAR LANCER

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY CREDITS: JONAS FISCHBACH PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/LUNARLANCER />

<BODY> **Fight through five vertically scrolling levels in this new shmup, released to mark the Game Boy's 35th anniversary.** B fires your standard weapon, with most enemies needing more than one hit to kill and you can pick up extra weapons and fire them with the A button. Careful though, as you only get a limited number of shots, as shown by the bottom-right energy bar. The smooth scrolling, includes some clever parallax effects, seemingly inspired by *Solar Striker*, while unlimited continues and good checkpoints will help you make progress in this entertaining blaster. </BODY>

SCORE: 83%

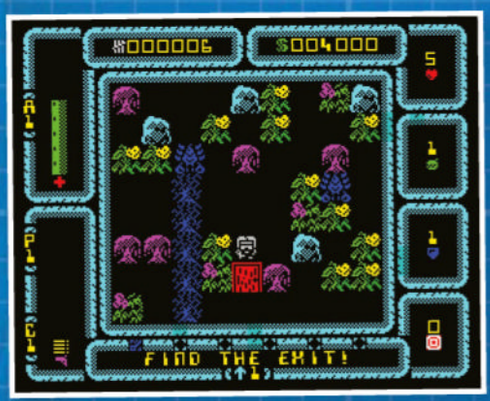
PROCESSING

<INTRO> AFTER GIVING US A NEW SPECTRUM KNIGHTMARE, TOM POTTER'S NEXT GAME SCION SCROLLS SMOOTHLY INTO VIEW </INTRO>

<BODY> **Tom's latest game is doing something different.** "I've not seen scrolling done with MPAGD [Multi-Platform Arcade Game Designer] by anyone, people would be surprised to discover how it was done. Once the game is finished, I'm planning a post on the MPAGD forum outlining how the effect was achieved."

SCION sees the player control agents from the Special Covert Infiltration Operations Network, fighting aliens and completing scenarios. "I aim to use my scrolling to create a turn-based RPG reminiscent of Julian Gollop's *Laser Squad* and *Lords Of Chaos*, but it would be fairer to compare *SCION* to something like *Alien Breed*," Tom continues. "Still to be done is animating the enemy sprites, designing later levels, and balancing the difficulty. Depending on memory availability, I would love to add some boss fights."

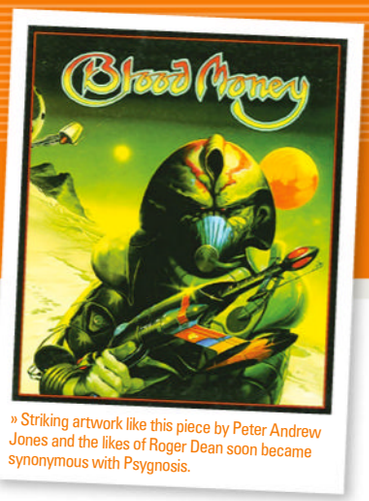
So when can we expect to play *SCION*? "I predict the game has maybe two months more work before it's ready. I'm hoping that Bitmap Soft will once again publish in physical form, so I'm looking at an availability date sometime in Spring 2025." We can't wait! </BODY>



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] FIND COLOURED KEYS TO OPEN DOORS, SHOOT ALIENS FOR CASH, AND USE THE UPLINK TO BUY EQUIPMENT. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES



» Striking artwork like this piece by Peter Andrew Jones and the likes of Roger Dean soon became synonymous with Psygnosis.

PONDERING PSYGNOSIS

The team discuss the many games that defined the iconic British publisher

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [Vita] Pygnosis was known as SCE Studio Liverpool when it closed in 2012. *WipEout 2048* was its last game.

Psygnosis was a massive deal during the 16-bit and 32-bit eras and still found success later on as SCE Studio Liverpool. Darran and the rest of the team look back at some of the studio's best games, from *Shadow Of The Beast* to *WipEout*.

DARRAN

What's the first Psygnosis game you remember?

NICK

The first one I was aware of was *Shadow Of The Beast*, but the first one I actually played was *Lemmings*.

TIM

It was *Terrorpods* because it came with the Amiga pack my parents bought us. I didn't get very far in it.

DARRAN

Our local computer shop in Parkstone had an Amiga display in the shop window and always seemed to have Psygnosis games on it. That's how I saw *Barbarian*, *Blood Money* and *Shadow Of The Beast* for the first time. What made Psygnosis games so memorable on release?

TIM

Part of it is the box art, it's metal as fuck.

DARRAN

Agreed, its artwork was instantly recognisable and often looked incredible.

NICK

To me, the company always seemed to put out games that were graphically impressive in different ways, whether that was the FMV in *Microcosm* or the gorgeous pixel art in *Flink*.

DARRAN

That's a fair point, Nick. You could argue that some games were certainly style over substance, but generally, I do think they made some excellent games. Does anyone have any particular favourites from the 16-bit era?

> "I was really impressed by Blood Money's intro with its amazing tune and samples"
>
> TIM EMPEY

NICK

Bob's Bad Day on the Amiga is a deep cut, but I really like it. It's a technically impressive maze game like *Cameltry*, in which you rotate the maze to move about.

TIM

I was really impressed by *Blood Money*'s intro with its amazing tune and all the samples used in it. I'm pretty sure Harry Enfield's Loadsamoney character is included on it. Also there's a cool wee racing game called *Nitro* that I really liked. And of course the classic *Shadow Of The Beast*.

DARRAN

All fine choices. I've always had a soft spot for *Agony*. It's not the slickest shooter on the Amiga, but it looks lovely and I think barn owls are beautiful-looking birds. I suppose we should return to *Lemmings* as it was absolutely gigantic. Did you both enjoy it?

NICK

Oh yeah, *Lemmings* is a favourite of mine, even though I played it on the Master System which made assigning jobs a little bit tricky.

TIM

Oh no! I mean yes, *Lemmings* was amazing. I did spend too long trapping them all between two blockers and blowing them all up! I don't think I played it on anything other than the Amiga though, it's probably a lot trickier without a mouse.

DARRAN

I had it on the SNES and the controls were a little tricky,

but at least you could pause it, which was super useful. It's probably the studios most-converted game isn't it, Nick? Did any versions stand out when you wrote our cover feature?

NICK

Nostalgic bias aside, the Master System, Commodore 64 and Lynx versions were all really good. The PlayStation version stood out as being a little underwhelming, which is surprising as Psygnosis was arguably at its peak on the console.

DARRAN

I've been looking online and it's quite surprising just how many games Psygnosis published during the Nineties. Does anything notable stand out for anyone? I didn't realise it did *Prince Of Persia 2*, for example.

NICK

I was surprised to learn that they ported *Darkstalkers* to the PlayStation – I would have assumed that was something Capcom would have handled.

DARRAN

As strange as that sounds, I'm pretty sure Probe did *X-Men: Children Of The Atom*, which is quite weird as well. Psygnosis really came of age on the PlayStation for many. Why was that?

NICK

Being owned by Sony must have had something to do with it – you'd imagine there would have been some preferential treatment when it came to getting development kits first. Psygnosis also worked with some great studios back then, like Reflections for *Destruction Derby* and Bizarre Creations for *Formula 1*.

» [PlayStation] It's a stock car smash up in *Destruction Derby*.

DARRAN

Did you have any PS1 favourites that you enjoyed, Tim?

TIM

Psygnosis had a really good run on the PlayStation. *Destruction Derby* was pretty cool as were *G-Police*, *Colony Wars* and of course *WipEout*, especially *2097*. On the other hand there was *3D Lemmings* and *Spice World*…

DARRAN

I didn't really mind *3D Lemmings*, but *Spice World* can get in the sea. It feels like *WipEout* was the series that truly elevated Psygnosis, in my opinion. It's so sad to think that the studio is no more. ✱

» [Amiga] *Lemmings* was Psygnosis' biggest hit during the 16-bit era and was converted to countless systems.

» [Amiga] *Blood Money* is an excellent shooter by DMA Designs and one of Darran's first introductions to Psygnosis.

» [PC] *Lemmings 2* also proved to be popular on many systems other than just the Amiga.

» The Psygnosis Owl was instantly recognisable to any gamer that enjoyed the publisher's games.

READERS REACT

The Psygnosis classics you loved to play

Michael Boyle
Agony on the Amiga, the animation and music quality just blew me away. It also helps that I was a big fan of side scrollers and platform games back then.

Judge Drokk
Brian The Lion, I'm greeted by the game's coder Michael Troughton in the end scroll when completing the game. He was a member of my Amiga demo team Anarchy. He was later the lead on *Destruction Derby*.

Marc Chagger
Lemmings! Being puzzle-based the gameplay is timeless. Graphics aside I don't think it's aged at all, and even then they still have bags of character.

Nick Jenkin
On the Commodore Amiga, it has to be *Nitro*. It's an excellent top-down racing game. You could drive as either Clint Eastwood, Rambo or James Bond… although I thought Bond looked more like snooker legend Steve Davis.

Dominik Susmel
You just knew shit's gonna be good when you saw that owl, no matter the game! Just like LucasArts. Midas touch of a logo. Kind of reverse of EA logo (although there was a time when that was good as well).

DJ Twinbee
The original *WipEout* was amazing, it had everything, one of my first favourite PlayStation games.

Michel Nemec
Lemmings, but I also played a lot of *Barbarian* on an old PC-XT, the one with the weird control scheme via function keys. My friend had an Amiga computer and *Walker*, that was something!

Rees
I'm going to go against the tide here and nominate *Blood Money*. As a kid I used to love all of the different vehicles and the chilled out soundtrack.

planetmatt
Lemmings on computer. *Destruction Derby* on console. Both are huge time sinks.

Dan Whitehead
Rollcage, it's a really satisfying combat racing game with a cool twist.

Leina
I'm gonna have to go with *Lemmings* or *Lemmings 2*.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

DONKEY KONG ARCADE MACHINE

"A five-hour drive and I paid $100 for it not working. I repaired and restored it over the course of a summer. All original parts!"

PAID: $100

SEALED COPY OF FALLOUT

"I found this in a used record store in Nashville. I've never seen another for sale."

PAID: $100

BIO

NAME:
Christian Puryear

LOCATION:
Nashville, Tennessee

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$300k+

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
NES

FAVOURITE GAME:
Turtle Bridge on Game & Watch. In 1981, a Japanese family moved next door and they brought this new game from Japan. It was very charming and like nothing else available in the States at that time

INSTAGRAM:
@vine.lodge

THE NINTENDO EFFECT

Christian Puryear on his love of Nintendo and how collecting has changed

While our latest collector has a collection that focusses on Nintendo, Christian Puryear actually started his collection journey with another system. "I first started collecting in the early Nineties when Atari 2600 games were plentiful and cheap," he says. "Back then, there wasn't even a known list of all titles and the online community was focussed on documenting everything; it was an exciting time to hunt down games."

After focussing on the aforementioned Atari 2600 for many years, Christian soon moved his attention to Nintendo systems, particularly the NES. "Interestingly, I have discovered that I enjoy collecting the cardboard boxes even more than playing the games themselves!" he says. "My collection mostly stops in the Nineties as I don't have much interest in collecting items after games move to disc-based systems and plastic clamshell cases."

So what is it about Nintendo items that Christian appreciates? "I'd say it's rooted in the company's profound and multifaceted history, which extends far beyond their well-known videogame consoles," he tells us. "Nintendo's ability to innovate while maintaining a consistent focus on entertainment and quality is truly remarkable. This consistent theme of balancing technological advancement with user-friendly design has led to timeless systems and games that continue to captivate audiences."

So considering he has such a strong connection with Nintendo, are there any specific franchises Christian likes to collect? "I have a special fondness for items linked to Nintendo's long history, as they embody the company's enduring legacy and creativity. The toys they designed and brought to market before videogames are particularly fascinating to me."

So we now know why Christian admires Nintendo so much, but where does he source his games? "It's from a variety of places, including online auctions, thrift stores, connections within the collector community, and occasionally retro gaming shops," he explains. "Fellow collectors are an invaluable resource, though online auctions offer great convenience. My favourite store (worldwide) is Beep in Akihabara."

It's not all good news on the collecting front though, and Christian tells us that collecting has changed quite significantly in the last decade. "The rise of online platforms has made rare items more accessible but it has also driven up prices and competition," he admits. "The growing popularity of retro gaming and grading has brought new collectors into the community, creating a more vibrant but competitive market. Bargains in thrift shops have become increasingly scarce and that also includes retro game stores in Japan – everybody follows online pricing now."

So with all the above in mind what advice does Christian have for anyone that's interested in starting up their own collection. Are there any particular things to look out for? "Set clear goals for your collection. Building connections within the collector community is essential, as networking can lead to acquiring hidden gems. Above all else, have a large attic for extra storage space. Looking ahead, there is a large market of reproductions (ie fakes) and that takes a discerning eye to detect. Hopefully graded games can help to avoid that challenge."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

KOSAI NO TOMO HANAFUDA SET

"Identified in a Nintendo catalogue from the Thirties. It includes a Thank You card from Hiroshi Yamauchi – Nintendo's third president. Was acquired from Yahoo auctions"

PAID: $150

OFFICIAL NINTENDO SEAL OF QUALITY SIGN

"Identified in images from the World Of Nintendo booth at the Consumer Electronics Show in 1990. It's sign #M32D and was acquired from a retiring retro game store owner."

PAID: $200

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

KYLE PETTY'S NO FEAR PROTOTYPE

■ "I acquired this for free as part of an internship when I helped out with games testing back in the day. Along with my complete Black Box set of NES games, it's easily the most precious item that I currently have in my collection. I'll never part with it!"

PAID: FREE

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

STREET FIGHTER II

PAL SNES copies of Capcom's masterful brawler shouldn't cost more than **£50** complete. The price comes down significantly if you just want the cartridge.

NIFTY LIFTY

If Nick's recollection of *Nifty Lifty* struck a chord with you, you'll be delighted to hear that you can pick it up for roughly **£6.**

TITUS THE FOX

Just 20 English notes will allow you to purchase a copy of this Amiga platformer. If you're lucky, we've seen it go for as little as a fiver.

MAGNETRON

Quazatron's sequel won't cost a lot to secure nowadays. It rarely sells for more than **£10,** making it quite an attractive deal.

HANG-ON

The card version of Sega's arcade conversion tends to be a little more expensive, but if you want a complete cartridge version of Sega's racer, it won't cost more than **£15** to acquire.

CANNON FODDER

We've seen the Amiga version go for as much as **£90,** but **£40** seems to be the going rate. If you want a fright, the CD32 version can go as high as **£250** if it's in brilliant condition.

BATSUGUN

The Sega Saturn version ranges from **£80** to **£145,** depending on its condition and if it contains a spinecard. If that's too pricey, the PS4 and Switch versions start at **£35.** The digital versions are slightly cheaper and can be picked up for **£27.**

LEMMINGS

The huge popularity of Psygnosis' Amiga edition means you can get it complete for under **£25** if you're happy to look around. Just be aware that if you fancy owning the excellent Lynx edition of the game you'll be paying as much as **£250** for it.

HOW MUCH?!

SUPER MARIO KART

We still can't get our head around this, but a sealed copy of the SNES racer sold for **£25,250** (with a **£21** postage charge on top). It's particularly bizarre as another sealed copy only sold for just over **£5,000.**

Prices correct at time of print

COMPUTERISED CARDBOARD

Nick compares classic digital trading card games to modern fare

Do you know what I really enjoy when I'm not playing videogames? Playing other types of games of course, and the games I've most often found myself really drawn to are trading card games. My first *Pokémon* battle was in cardboard form rather than on a Game Boy, and before long I started heading to Harlow's Marquee Models to play against others. It was there that I discovered *TopDeck* magazine and all manner of other games, from the short-lived likes of *WCW Nitro* to classics like *Legend Of The Five Rings*. The one that truly caught my heart was the original, *Magic: The Gathering* – a game that fans jokingly nicknamed "cardboard crack" because of its addictive nature. I totally understand why, because although I have an on-off relationship with the game, at my most invested I was living with other players and even travelled to France for a tournament.

Given that level of commitment, you probably won't be surprised to learn that I have supplemented my habit with digital trading card games over the years. My current vice is *Pokémon TCG Pocket*, a streamlined version of the game designed for mobile play, and the experience has brought me full circle – my initial experience with digital trading card games came via the Game Boy Color version of *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, which I decided to revisit as part of my *Chromatic* review this issue. Playing both together has really brought home just how much has changed over the last 25 years, and much of that has been for the better. The cards of yesteryear are rather puny compared to those available today, yet the modern game is better balanced thanks to decades of design experience. Even so, I did come away with a sense that something is missing from today's digital card games.

For a start, there's the fact that I could revisit the Game Boy Color game at all. I've played plenty of digital trading card games, and most of them were live service games that have ceased to exist as they were. *Gwent* is playable but official support has ended, while *Might & Magic: Duel Of Champions* has a fan revival server. *Tekken Card Tournament* has been shut down for years, but since the digital cards were obtained by scanning physical cards, I still have those to play with. Then there's *SolForge*, a game that I backed on Kickstarter in 2012 – while I did get my money's worth from it, the game is long gone and fan servers were closed at the request of the copyright holder, so I'll never get to feel the joy of ruining someone's day with a Grimgaunt Devourer again. Meanwhile, there's always a chance that I can convince a friend (or, depending on your perspective, trick a victim) into playing *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters' Clash* with me.

It's much easier to play *Pokémon TCG Pocket* with real opponents than it is to find someone else with a Neo Geo Pocket Color and a copy of SNK's brilliant card battler, of course. This is theoretically a good thing, as my love for trading card games comes from both their gameplay and the social experiences they create. However, *Pokémon TCG Pocket* doesn't include any chat features or even user-created avatars – a choice undoubtedly made to safeguard the game's younger players, but one that leaves online battles feeling indistinct from playing against the CPU. What the old *Pokémon Trading Card Game* and *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters' Clash* offer instead is a sense of personality, as both have an RPG-lite structure with a world to explore. Rather than simply presenting "Blastoise EX & Vaporeon Deck" from a menu, the older games give me places to visit – clubs based on certain card types or a theme park with a recreation of *Resident Evil*'s Spencer Mansion, filled with opponents with names and faces.

It's easy to see why digital trading card games are often given the free-to-play live service treatment today, as the low barrier of entry helps the online scene to thrive. But I think there's a place for the old style of digital trading card games with self-contained card pools and single-player adventures, and thankfully there are plenty that I've yet to try. There are older games that I'm sure I'd love, like the well-regarded 1997 *Magic: The Gathering* PC game. The *Yu-Gi-Oh! Early Days Collection* is out soon and I've never dabbled with Konami's long-running game before, and if I fancy something modern there's *Shadowverse: Champion's Battle* on Switch. In the meantime, if someone crushes you with a Celebi EX deck in *Pokémon TCG Pocket*, it might just be me.

DECKED OUT

DEFUNCT TRADING CARD GAMES I'VE ENJOYED

ULTIMATE COMBAT!
I mostly like this martial arts-themed *Magic* clone because of the Body Odor card, which prevents your opponent from attacking you.

TOMB RAIDER
I bought into this heavily with my friend James, just as it died. It played more like a board game than a trading card game.

WWE RAW DEAL
A pretty good game hamstrung somewhat by licensing issues. My favourite decks to play were Mankind and Booker T.

UNIVERSAL FIGHTING SYSTEM
Now replaced by *Universus*, this game made *Street Fighter* versus *Mortal Kombat* and *Darkstalkers* versus *Soulcalibur* possible.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
This rather excellent game died when Blizzard chose not to renew the licence, and launched *Hearthstone* soon after.

[iOS] I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH TIME I'VE SPENT ON POKEMON TCG POCKET, BUT IT'S ALREADY A LOT.
HAYATE
BP 400
SP + 1
CHOOSE CHARACTER POSITI
[NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] MEET ME AT KFC, AND I WILL SHOW YOU THE WAYS OF CARD FIGHTERS' CLASH.
[DON'T! IT'S A TRAP! - ED]

I LOVED PLAYING MAGIC AT COLCHESTER'S XTREME TRADES – THE ATMOSPHERE WAS COMPETITIVE BUT FRIENDLY, AND THE STORE IS MUCH-MISSED.
[GAME BOY COLOR] THIS KEPT ME OCCUPIED BETWEEN TRIPS TO MARQUEE MODELS FOR POKEMON LEAGUE SESSIONS.
SEAKING LV28
HORN ATTACK
WATERFALL 10
30
[PC] MICROPROSE'S MAGIC: THE GATHERING MAY JUST SATISFY MY CRAVINGS FOR A GAME THAT I'VE BEEN MISSING.
[IOS] I USED TO ENJOY SOLFORGE, AND THE NEW GAME SOLFORGE FUSION JUST ISN'T THE SAME.
[XBOX 360] I OFTEN USED TO REVIEW GAMES LIKE MIGHT & MAGIC DUEL OF CHAMPIONS: FORGOTTEN WARS FOR OUR SISTER MAGAZINES.
CAN OLD TYPEWRITER... A MESSAGE...)
[NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] PLAYING ONLINE IS GREAT, BUT A WELL-CONSTRUCTED SINGLE-PLAYER GAME IS JUST AS GOOD.
90 HP
NamcoBandai
09
90 HP
Yoshimitsu
FOCUS
STRIKE
BLOCK
[IOS] JUST LIKE REGULAR TEKKEN, I MAINLY PLAYED AS YOSHIMITSU IN TEKKEN CARD TOURNAMENT.

TOP DECKS

Readers share their favourite card battling games

Sanny Syberfeldt
The *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters' Clash* games are at the top for me. Amazing card art, fun vibes and simple yet deep rules make me come back again and again. Joustus from *Shovel Knight: King of Cards* gets an honourable mention!

Mike
Triple Triad from *Final Fantasy VIII* is better than most fully released card games out there. Perfection.

Stephen Marshall
Microprose's *Magic: The Gathering* is still playable on modern PCs (just) thanks to the 2010 fan-made version! I still play it and it still holds up, especially the *Shandalar* RPG. I would love to see a fan remake.

Alister Almond
The two that ate up a lot of my childhood are *Yu-Gi-Oh! Forbidden Memories* which had an amazing soundtrack and so fun in multiplayer, and the other being *Digimon Card Battle*, a really underrated game. Both are on PlayStation.

Games on Screen
The *Pokémon Trading Card Game* on Game Boy and *Yu-Gi-Oh! Eternal Duelist Soul* on Game Boy Advance. Sure, there are modern ways to play these card games with updated rules, but I prefer the older rule sets from simpler times.

Harley Palmer
Arcana was an interesting one. It's a dungeon crawler where every enemy and character is portrayed by cards.

Robert August de Meijer
Puzzle Strike is like *Street Fighter, StarCraft, Dominion,* and *Tetris* rolled into one, and it works! In fact, I think I'm going to play a round of it right now!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

» Does anyone else want to read about *The Transformers: The Movie*, or is it just David?

STAR LETTER

BAD RETRO GAMER, GOOD RETRO GAMER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Your magazine is awful. In fact, it's sadistic. In the three months that I've been a subscriber, I've been overwhelmed by the urge to rewire all of my old consoles. I've also been scouring my local flea markets to find the gems you mention in your pages. As a father of two, my gaming time is already more than compressed. Really, you're not being very kind to me at all. As a result, my Steam Deck is now packed with retro games and my attic is starting to be converted into a retro-games room. I'll keep you posted in a few months, if my wife hasn't cancelled my magazine subscription in the meantime.
Keep up the good work!
Gaëtan Duchateau

We love hearing from readers who have decided to expand their collection after reading about games in the magazine. We're glad you're enjoying the content Gaëtan and really hope that your wife doesn't cancel your subscription. Have a book to add to your collection in the meantime.

» We'd imagine Gaëtan's Steam Deck homepage has a lot more retro games on it.

BEYOND GAMES

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I've recently been reading about Darran's growing obsession with Hot Toys figures in the latest issue and it made me think – why doesn't **Retro Gamer** have a dedicated classic toys section? It obviously doesn't need to be huge, but if Darran is an indicator of the mag's audience then there's bound to be some crossover. I'd love to see a spread about *The Transformers* and *He-Man* for example, as I loved the cartoons as a kid.
Yours faithfully,
David Perkins

Thanks for the suggestion, David. While we're sure that there are plenty of readers who would be interested in retro outside of videogames, it's not something we're planning to cover. Who knows though, maybe a My Retro Life might take this angle one issue.

PLAYING WITH SUPER POWER

Howdy **Retro Gamer**!
Indeed, the Mega Drive brought the arcade experience to your home. But I must point out that once the Super Nintendo came out, it stole Sega's thunder. While the SNES gave us *Final Fight*, *UN Squadron*, *Turtles In Time*, *Street Fighter II*, a better *Sunset Riders*, *Ninja Warriors*, a better *Mortal Kombat II*, *Bust-A-Move* and *Killer Instinct*, in that time span the MegaDrive gave us blood in *Mortal Kombat*, eight-year-old *Gauntlet*, and 15fps *Virtua Racing*. In the ongoing console war, I still often see Sega fanboys defend their side with the argument that their machine was better for arcade conversions. But I believe that only really counts if you only mention games that were released before the war started. Now you're playing with Super Power!
Robert August de Meijer

Thanks for writing in, Robert. In all fairness we never explicitly stated that the Mega Drive was the better console for arcade conversions, compared to the SNES, just that they were pivotal in the machine's early days, which we're sure you'll agree they were. If we are going to play the 'which console was better' card though, we'll counter-attack with the fact that Sega's console utterly annihilated the SNES when it came to quality shmup arcade conversions.

» [Mega Drive] The SNES had some great shmups, but couldn't get close to the Mega Drive's numerous arcade conversions. Sorry, Robert.

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer,
Future Publishing, Quay House,
The Ambury, Bath,
Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [Mega Drive] Mega Cat's *ZPF* is looking excellent. We can't wait for the finished version.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Switch 2

Yes, we like retro games, but we also like modern ones as well and Nintendo's new console is on our want list. Nick feels it's a lot more conservative looking than the original, while Darran is hoping it will boost his many poorly optimised Switch games. Tim just wants to know when it's getting Game Pass.

SOMETHING'S BREWING

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Just an idea here, but the Sega Genesis indie dev scene is booming right now. There are scores of new titles in development. Whilst I know **Retro Gamer** has a dedicated segment to discuss the indie scene I still find that it is an area you could potentially direct more attention to. Discussing the games in the pipeline would not only be welcome reading for **RG** subscribers but it is great exposure for these indie developers – helping to keep the scene going. Here is a video on YouTube (youtube.com/watch?v=zHR-wxPz0Ic) I recently watched and honestly there is some really exciting stuff from studios like Neofid and Mega Cat in the works. It would be great to see a **Retro Gamer** article about these indie games with some developer commentary in the coming months.
Regards,
Nick

Have you had a chance to look at our recent Mega Drive arcade feature Nick, as there's some great examples in there. You're right that the system does seem to be getting a lot of love at the moment, so maybe we can look at putting something together.

» [PlayStation 3] It's nice to see some love for *Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3* from readers.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Capcom one-on-one fighter?

A Scanner Knightly
Super Street Fighter II Turbo. It's a legendary fighter. Adding the Super Moves to an already great game was the update we never knew we needed.

Brian H
Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix/ Pocket Fighter. It's just pure joy and doesn't ever feel stressful to play.

James Byers
Street Fighter II: Champion Edition is still high on all-time favourites list.

Rat Stash
Does *Power Stone* count? Because if it does then *Power Stone* 100%.

Llama King
Street Fighter II Turbo. It's a total game changer. From the iconic voice samples to its endless playability to its cover art. Everything about this game screams masterpiece.

RETRO SHERRIFU
Street Fighter Alpha 3! With its gorgeous 2D pixel artwork to its massive roster, (not to mention a killer soundtrack) *Street Fighter Alpha 3* is still one of the best games ever made.

F
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike. I really like the graphics, animations, backgrounds and most importantly the gameplay and the parry system.

TheShend
Not telling. [Hah! I know what it is – Ed]

John
I've always had a huge soft spot for *Capcom Vs SNK: Millennium Fight Pro.* It had a huge roster, and the fighting always felt tightly controlled. I would love to see a third iteration.

Antony Longmore
Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3. It has stunning visuals and a fantastic roster of characters.

Sinfour
Street Fighter II Turbo for sure. The game holds up pretty good nowadays, and younger generations find this game good, as we did in the early Nineties. It's easy to learn, and still being used in competitions around the world.

Wambam Wammy
Street Fighter Alpha 2. SFA2 refined the *SFII* formula to near perfection and is the one I go back to most often. Great anime-like graphics, great music and a fantastic Arcade mode that had character-specific bosses and new challenger fights.

Bobson Dugnutt
Super Street Fighter II Turbo. So perfect, yet so broken. I could spend hours on two-player mode with a few mates and a few beers. Absolute bliss.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Darran 'Agony' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443
Art Editor **Andy 'Lemmings' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Cannon Fodder' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'WipEout' Thorpe**
Photographer **Phil 'Walker' Barker**
Group Art Director **Woz 'Blood Money' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Destruction Derby' Mott**

Contributors
©CAPCOM, ©SNK CORPORTATION ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Contributors
Writing Steve Boxer, Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Andrew Fisher, Stuart Hunt, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Graham Pembrey, Paul Rose, Lewis White

Design Ryan Robbins

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Director **Chris Mitchell**
chris.mitchell@futurenet.com
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at **licensing@futurenet.com** or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com** .
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

Subscriptions
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Subscription enquiries **www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Consumer Revenues Director **Sharon Todd**

Subscription delays: Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

Circulation
Circulation Manager **Matthew de Lima**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller **Vivienne Calvert**

Management
Managing Director, Games and Ents **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director **Rodney Dive**
Commercial Finance Director **Tania Bruning**
SVP Consumer **Kevin Addley**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ipso. Regulated

Widely Recycled

RELIVE THE GLORY DAYS OF HANDHELD SUPREMACY

Celebrate portable pioneers such as the Microvision, Game & Watch and Game Boy to recent rogues like the Nintendo DS and PSP as you embark on a journey into the world of portable gaming! You might need a few AAs…

NEW
DISCOVER THE BEST PORTABLE RETRO CONSOLES EVER MADE
130
PAGES OF POCKET POWER
retro GAMER PRESENTS
THE HANDHELD GAMING COLLECTION
NINTENDO · SEGA · ATARI · SONY · NEO GEO & MORE!

ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

>>LOAD 270

nextmonth

ON SALE 13TH MARCH 2025

ULTIMATE GUIDE

BUBBLE BOBBLE

EVERYTHING YOU EVER NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT TAITO'S MAGNIFICENT BUBBLE-BLOWING ARCADE SMASH

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...

Alien Highway, PlayStation 2, Turrican II: The Final Fight, Dino Crisis, The Legacy, 32X, Julian Rignall, Odin Computer Graphics, Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game Of The Movie, R-Type DX

000000190234 00
CARL
BARRIER
21 turn street
CAT CALL
40

BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger

THE SPRITE FANTASTIC

» RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2009 » ARC SYSTEM WORKS

Way back when I was at university, I started covering coin-op games on a voluntary basis for a site called Arcade Heroes. It was a really interesting time to get involved, as a fighting game renaissance was just getting underway – *Street Fighter IV* seemed like it was going to be a strong return for the legendary series, and the *The King Of Fighters XII* promised a stunning new high-definition 2D look.

However, my underdog favourite was *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger*, a new game from the developers of *Guilty Gear* that placed highly detailed sprites against 3D backgrounds. The only problem would be finding it. One industry figure explained that it was unlikely to get UK distribution, because fighting games thrive on regular players and communities – something our scene wasn't really set up for, with seaside venues and bowling alleys making up the bulk of the market.

He was right, but the wait for the home port was well worth it. The game felt like the breath of fresh air I had desperately wanted it to be, primarily because its small roster was full of memorable characters that had very distinct play styles. My favourites include the comically dramatic ninja Bang Shishigami, Carl Clover and his semi-independent marionette Nirvana, and my main character Noel Vermillion. I even found the community I needed when it became popular in my house, with one housemate's girlfriend eventually becoming truly fearsome with Taokaka.

Sadly, just as the *BlazBlue* series came about during a period of inactivity for *Guilty Gear*, the situation has now been reversed and we haven't seen a new *BlazBlue* console release since 2019. Arc System Works' CEO has said that he doesn't want the two series competing with one another, and while I can understand that from a business perspective, it's hard to take as a fan – and a reminder of just how little time it can take to start missing something. ✱

ENDGAME

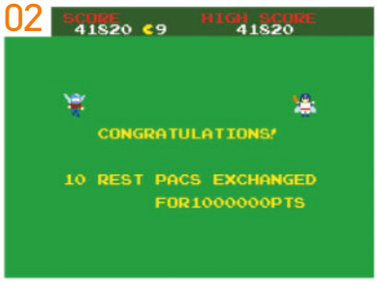
PAC-LAND

» You'd think that being famous would be a blessing, yet it turned poor Pac-Man's life into a nightmare. By the mid-Eighties, he couldn't even go out for a walk without being harassed by all manner of ghostly assailants, the majority of whom seemed to want credit as co-stars in his hit arcade game. Can he make it home in one piece? Let's skip to the end and find out...

01

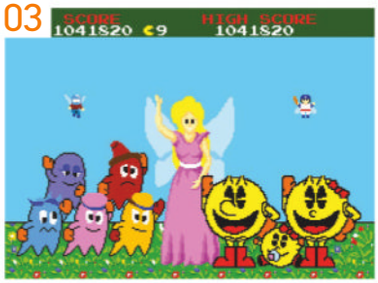
» Pac-Man's back home with his Pac-Family, as it should be. With Ms Pac-Man, also as it should be – not that shady impostor Pac-Mom, who keeps showing up in all the modern games.

02



» Now that he's safely in his house, Pac-Man can trade all his extra lives for more points, because he hasn't yet learned his lesson about the negative attention his wealth has created.

03



» But it's fine, because everyone's happy. Pac-Man used the points to give the ghosts a raise, there's a huge fairy, life is golden – at least until the next time Pac-Man goes out for a walk.

04

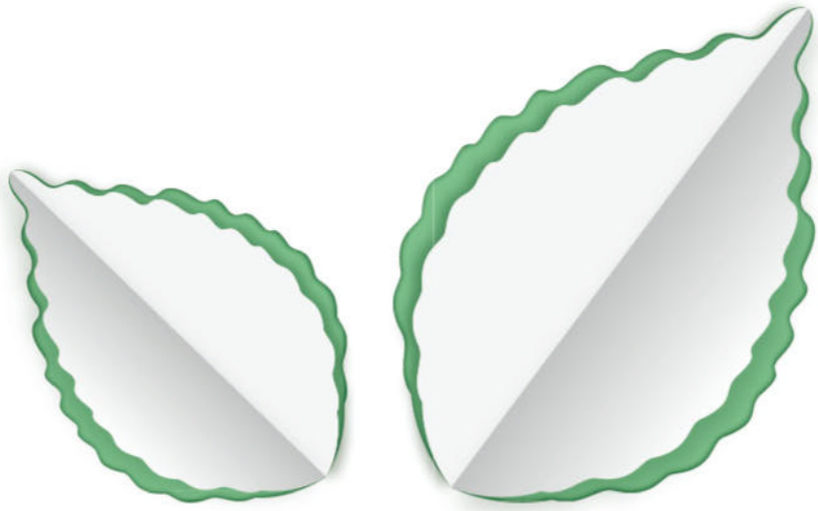
» Now there's a tree, filled with what appear to be Power Pellets. Do you think that's just something nice that the Pac-Family keep in their garden, or do you reckon they've grown it as a visible threat to the ghosts? Maybe the ghosts should steal it, Shelbyville-style.

05

» And now the story is over. That's it, fancy writing is up, go home. What's the significance of the tree? We don't know. Nobody tells us. Honestly, this is just like *Shenmue* all over again, except that *Pac-Land* predates it by over a decade. Just don't think about it.

WIN A £50
NATIONAL BOOK TOKEN

We're giving away £7,500 to spend on books!
Scan the **QR code** or visit **lovepaper.org** to enter



PAPER LOVES TREES

European forests, which provide wood for making paper, paper packaging and many other products, have been growing by 1,500 football pitches every day!

Source: Two Sides Analhysis of FAO data, 2005-2020
European Forests: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK

Discover the story of paper
www.lovepaper.org
Scan for paper facts, activities, blogs and much more!

LOVE PAPER®
www.lovepaper.org

With thanks to
NATIONAL BOOK tokens

WANTED
SECOND HAND
win prizes
facebook

CHILLOUT GAMES

where gamers collect

www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell

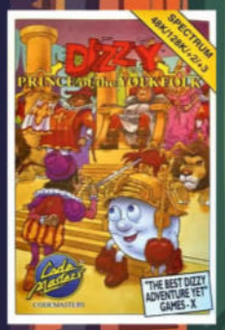
Trustpilot

£££ paid for your games:

Popular/Rare, New/Used, Consoles/Accessories
Collectors Edition, Limited Run, USA/JPN, Promo

£77

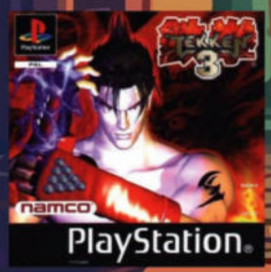
£173



£17

£78

£163



£18

£72

£102

£36

FREE PARCELFORCE DOORSTEP COLLECTION

FAST PAYMENT

Prices valid 10/2/25 and subject to change daily. Prices are for PayPal (Shop Credit add 12% more).
Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd.
Full terms & conditions can be found at at www.chilloutgames.co.uk